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The Transformation of Social Values and Solidarity Attitudes in Provincial Russia

(based on the example of the Nizhny Novgorod region, years 2002 – 2014)¹

The long-term studies of a process or an event with constant monitoring focused on large population groups and territories are normally based on the measuring of economic and social factors as well as on setting down some “objective political facts” (for example, the percentage of the citizens who take part in elections). In this report we would like to present an integrated – socio-psychological evaluation of transformations which occurred with the residents of the Nizhny Novgorod region during the past 12 years. We will focus specifically on the values, solidarity and altruism transformation analysis of the urban residents.

Describing the territory under study as a “Russian provincial town”, we regard being “provincial” through the “dependence” factor in four main dimensions:

- dependence on a narrow circle of industrial facilities (economic aspect),
- dependence of political initiatives (political aspect),
- limited culture budget (culture is underappreciated and dependent on economic problems; cultural aspect),
- orientation on the so-called “demodernized” lifestyle (civilization aspect)².

V.V. Vagin considers a provincial town in the sociological perspective as “a rich soil for the culture of self-sufficiency” which can “silently oppose the state”³. The idea of a “provincial town” opposing the state is described in other studies, for example, in the works of Yu.M. Plyusnin who emphasizes that a provincial Russian town is characterized by high solidarity which may lead to the successful development of the local administration and insensitivity to the civic initiatives of the government⁴.

Is the definition of “a provincial town” applicable to Nizhny Novgorod, the capital of the Volga Federal District?

Nizhny Novgorod is an industrial center, the fifth most populated city in Russia, located in the center of the East European Plain at the confluence of the Oka and the Volga rivers. Founded in 1221, now it is considered to be the national center of ship-, aircraft- and car-building industries as well as of IT-technologies. Between 1959 and 1991 it was closed for foreigners because of the highly-developed arms

¹ This research was carried out with the support of the Russian Foundation for Humanities 2014/2015, project No. 14-03-00617 “Regional Identity in the Conditions of Social and Economic Changes (on the example of the Nizhny Novgorod region in 2002 – 2014 years)”.

² Вагин В.В. Русский провинциальный город: ключевые элементы жизнеустройства // Мир России. 1997. №4. С. 53 – 88.

³ Вагин В.В., С. 55.

⁴ Плюснин Ю.М. «Свои» и «чужие» в русском провинциальном городе // Мир России. 2013. №3. С. 60-93.

industry. Nowadays it is the center of river cruises tourism in Russia and a place which hosts various international exhibitions in the Nizhny Novgorod Fair.

To reconstruct the socio-economic and political contexts of the transformation of phenomena under study (values, solidarity, and altruism of the residents) and also to justify the statement that the studied territory is a “provincial town”, let us have a look at some economic and political data in dynamics (cf. Table 1).

Table 1

The Evaluation of the Socio-Economic Development of the Cities with a Million-Plus Population⁵

No.	City	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
1	Volgograd	0.15	0.11	0.9	0.19	0.21	0.17	0.15	0.21	0.18
2	Yekaterinburg	0.56	0.58	0.57	0.65	0.71	0.79	0.66	0.71	0.74
3	Kazan	0.48	0.48	0.45	0.48	0.45	0.41	0.36	0.48	0.45
4	Nizhny Novgorod	0.32	0.34	0.35	0.34	0.37	0.42	0.38	0.48	0.38
5	Novosibirsk	0.41	0.45	0.46	0.39	0.43	0.46	0.55	0.65	0.63
6	Omsk	0.28	0.31	0.32	0.59	0.55	0.56	0.43	0.36	0.32
7	Perm	0.60	0.60	0.51	0.56	0.53	0.52	0.44	0.43	0.41
8	Rostov-on-Don	0.35	0.38	0.35	0.35	0.42	0.41	0.38	0.37	0.41
9	Samara	0.51	0.47	0.47	0.42	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.48	0.40
10	Ufa	0.45	0.41	0.50	0.54	0.53	0.54	0.59	0.47	0.39
11	Chelyabinsk	0.39	0.38	0.38	0.35	0.41	0.39	0.43	0.30	0.31

The set of indicators for the evaluation of socio-economic development for the million-plus Russian cities: the population as of the end of the year, thousands of people; the volume of dispatched own-produced goods, services and works effected with internal resources, as of all kinds of activities, millions of rubles; the retail turnover, millions of rubles; investments to the core assets (in the actual prices), millions of rubles; new housing supply, thousands of square meters; average monthly nominal wage, rubles; the number of the unemployed registered by the State Unemployment Agency.

So, according to the socio-economic study by Malykh, Polyanskaya and Shamsutdinova for the years 2002 – 2010 Nizhny Novgorod is the eighth among 11 million-plus cities – without pronounced development dynamics (in 2002 and 2010).

In 2012 Nizhny Novgorod was leading in the mortality rate⁶ and entered the top-three million-plus cities with the biggest deficit of the budget⁷.

⁵ Quoted by: О.Е. Малых, И.К. Полянская, А.Ф. Шамсутдинова ОЦЕНКА УРОВНЯ СОЦИАЛЬНО-ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО РАЗВИТИЯ ГОРОДОВ-МИЛЛИОННИКОВ КАК СТЕПЕНЬ РЕАЛИЗАЦИИ АДМИНИСТРАТИВНОГО РЕСУРСА // Вестник ЮУрГУ, №30, 2012. С. 14-20.

⁶ «Основные итоги социально-экономического развития города Нижнего Новгорода за 2012 год», 19 марта 2013.

⁷ По размеру дефицита бюджета Нижний Новгород вошел в тройку лидеров городов-миллионников // 11 декабря 2013 NEWSNN.RU: <http://newsnn.ru/news/112162>

In the political perspective, at the turn of the 20th century Nizhny Novgorod was described as a city having the “new political power” – actively protesting voters⁸. In 2005 the Nizhny Novgorod retired people were among the leaders in protest activities against the social welfare monetization (cf. Table 2).

Table 2

Protest Activities in Russia between January 9 – February 20, 2005

(from the data of the Center for the Research of the Political Culture in Russia: *SELECTIVELY*)⁹

	Week 1 Jan 9-16	Week 2 Jan 17-23	Week 3 Jan 24-30	Week 4 Jan 31 - Feb 6	Week 5 Feb 7-13	Week 6 Feb 14-20	9.01-20.02 Total
The Moscow Region	15,450	27,400	18,500	900	53,450	0	115,700
The Nizhny Novgorod Region	810	11,300	13,100	100	30,000	0	56,210
Saint-Petersburg region	21210	6520	12000	8700	16200	800	65430

The voting behavior of the Nizhny Novgorod residents in the end of the 90s – at the turn of the years two thousand, as a rule, was critical and “protesting”. For example, in 2001 at the Nizhny Novgorod governor elections the voting turnout was 37%. The processing of the voting papers showed that in the first ballot G.Khodyrev got 25% (Communist party of Russian Federation), I.Sklyarov – 21%, V.Bulavinov – 20%, D.Savelyev – 13%, A.Klimentyev – 11%, against all – 10% (Khodyver won the second ballot with the turnout of 37%).

However, in 2014 at the Nizhny Novgorod governor elections the turnout was higher than in Moscow, coming up to 54.49%. V.P.Shantsev won in the first ballot with 87% (United Russia party “Edinaya Rossiya“, the current ruling political party). Other candidates were far behind: A.Bochkarev got 6% of the votes, A.Kurdyumov – 3%, M.Suraykin – 2%, M.Kuznetsov – 1%, A.Zavyalov – 0.5%, R.Dosaev – 0.5%. No violations were documented and no protests or demonstrations were observed after the elections. Evidently, the protest potential of the Nizhny Novgorod residents had been exhausted.

Under the UNESCO initiative and in the framework of the program “Cultural Capitals of the Volga Region”, Nizhny Novgorod was rated as the cultural capital of the Volga Federal District (“non-capital” territory) at the beginning of the years two thousand. However, the fact of the limited financial support of culture is openly

⁸ Маслов О., Прудник А. Активно-протестный электорат. 27.07.2004 <http://www.polit.nnov.ru/2004/07/27/electorat/>

⁹ Центр исследований политической культуры. URL: www.cipkr.ru

admitted in the official reports¹⁰. For example, in the course of the public hearing on the 2014 budget on December 10 it was emphasized that the city budget has no money either for the “development or for the necessary renewal of the cultural institutions.”¹¹ Economic deprivation adds to the “demodernization” of the territory in general (starting with the problems of the old housing, ending with the death-rate).

Thus we consider Nizhny Novgorod to be a provincial city (as a territory pretending to be capital but at the same time rapidly losing this status) and keeping that in mind we will try to answer the question about the nature of the transformation of values, solidarity and altruism for the Nizhny Novgorod residents in the course of the 12 years of the study.

Sampling and Methodology of the Study

The main tool that we used was the questionnaire “Regional Priorities”, which consisted of 25 statements describing various directions of the city development. The questionnaire was aimed to reveal:

- the directions of the city development significant for all the residents (as the respondents see them);
- the directions of the city development significant for the respondent personally;
- the directions where the survey participants were planning their individual activities.

The resulting data was analyzed to reveal the occurrence of solidarity and altruism. We considered solidarity as the similarity of opinions and actions, coincidence and conformity of the individual and group opinions and interests. Altruism was interpreted as unselfish care for the others’ well-being.

The techniques of extracting the relevant data were as follows. The questionnaire featured 25 main directions of the city development, which were related to the ecological programs, culture, industry, communication development programs, etc. Apart from the individual preferences in the city development priorities, the questionnaires made it possible to indicate:

- degree to which every respondent shares common values for the development of the territory he lives in (factor which determines the correlation of the choices “important for most of the residents”/ “important for me” – the solidarity factor);
- degree to which every respondent is ready to act for the development of his/her priorities (factor, which determines the correlation of the choices

¹⁰ Доклад главы администрации города Нижнего Новгорода о достигнутых значениях показателей для оценки эффективности деятельности ОМСУ за 2012 год.

¹¹ Проект бюджета Нижнего Новгорода прошёл публичные слушания: <http://gorky.tv/posts/1719-proekt-byudzheta-nizhnego-novgoroda-proshyol-publichnye-slushaniya.html>

“important for me”/ “ready to participate” – the activity and positive egoism factor);

- degree to which every respondent is ready to act for what he/she considers important for others (factor, which determines the correlation of the choices “important for most of the residents”/ “ready to participate” – the altruism factor).

Sampling of the first stage (516 people) had the following structure:

- 25% - young people under 30, 35% - residents 31 to 60 years old, 40% - over 60;
- 49% women and 51% men;
- 18% - retired people, 16% - public administration, 22% - education, healthcare, 44% - industrial sector employees;
- 7% - residents with partially completed high school education, 20% - residents with completed high school education, 35% - with secondary education (technical schools) and 38% - had university degree.

Presently the second stage of the research is not completed yet, the comparative analysis will use the results from 149 people (103 women, 46 men; 62 young people under 30, 75 people from 31 to 60 years old, 12 people over 60).

The study is currently continuing, so the present results are intermediate.

Description of the Study Results

It is considered that political preferences and positions as well as the attitudes to various political institutions do not influence (or influence insignificantly) the social behavior (Brosig-Koch, Helbach, Ochenfels, Wermann, 2011)¹². A group of German sociologists compared the solidarity and altruism attitudes of Eastern and Western Germans shortly after the reunification of Germany and at the present time, coming to the conclusion that social behavior, as contrasted to political positions and attitudes to the political regime, is quite inert: it is formed at the early stages of the personal socialization and then changes insignificantly. In their opinion, to spread pro-social behavior one needs a lot of time, society control and introduction (popularization) of new social norms.

Taking into account the results of this study, we assume that if a social study is long-term, the researchers are likely to face the “cohort effect”. Let us analyze the results we received in 2002 and 2014.

The values transformation of the Nizhny Novgorod residents was studied by the personally-significant choice of the city development priorities (cf. Table 3).

Table 3

¹² Brosig-Koch, Jeannette, Helbach, Christoph, Ochenfels, Axel, Wermann, Joachim. 2011. “Still Different after All These Years: Solidarity Behavior in East and West Germany”. *Journal of Public Economics*, vol.95, issues 11-12, pp.1373-1376.

Personal Priorities in the City Development (“Top” Positions)

	Under 30 (90/62 people)	30-60 years old (176/75 people)	Over 60 (250/12 people)
2002	Free education (79%); free medical care (67%); solving the ecological problems (66%)	Free medical care (71%); free education (69%)	Free medical care (85%); social security (76%); solving the ecological problems (76%)
2014	Free education (84%); free medical care (84%); housing programs (77%)	Free medical care (85%); housing programs (79%); preserving the nature (79%)	Social security (92%); preserving the historical places (84%)

In the process of defining the “personal priorities of the city development” we follow the understanding of the respondents’ values, which corresponds more to the axiological terminology in psychology – in the context of needs (A.Maslow), in the context of personal importance (G.Allport) and in the context of acknowledged meanings of life (B.Bratus). It is also necessary to point out that in 2002 and 2014 the study was conducted on different samples. Still, all the sample sub-groups both in 2002 and 2014 believe that free medical care was the most important thing in the city development (insurance – non-commercial care). “Free education” is relevant for the age group under 30 (in both samplings). Solving ecological problems is important for the sub-groups under 30 and over 60 in 2002 (in 2014 the residents from 30 to 60 years old pointed out the high importance of preserving the nature).

One can track the “logics of ageing” of certain groups (for example, in 2002 young people under 30 were actively supporting solving ecological problems, and in 12-years time the importance of preserving the nature was emphasized by the age group from 30 to 60), as well as the logics of “social trends” (in 2014 all the age groups under 60 marked the city programs focused on introducing of the new housing as personally important). The “profile” of the respondents’ personal priorities evidently shows the relevance of performing the social age tasks (receive a degree, buy housing, etc.). What is more, it defines the deprived need for safety (the absolute leader of the personal priorities is keeping the medical care free).

Comparison of readiness to act of different social groups presented in Table 4 analyzes the degree to which the respondents from different social groups were ready to act in 2002 and 2014 in the different urban development programs (cf. Table 4).

Table 4

Readiness to Act in the Framework of the Urban Development Programs

	Under 30 (90/62 people)	30-60 years old (176/75 people)	Over 60 (250/12 people)
2002	Solving ecological problems (47%); saving the nature (42%)	Solving ecological problems (36%); saving the nature (32%); programs for children	Solving ecological problems (36%); saving the nature (30%); programs for children and young people

		and young people (31%)	(33%)
2014	Solving ecological problems (48%); saving the nature (47%)	Solving ecological problems (51%); saving the nature (45%); programs for children and young people (41%)	Solving ecological problems (58%); free medical care (50%); preserving the religion and cathedrals (50%)

According to Table 4, which shows the residents' readiness for participation in the development of urban environment, the efforts to save the ecology and urban nature are the most appealing ones. Besides, the middle-aged group is focused on the involvement into urban programs aimed at supporting young people.

Our results are also supported by the statistics of the Nizhny Novgorod residents' protest activities. In the past 10 years almost half of the most bright and remarkable protest actions in Nizhny Novgorod were related to the ecology and saving the urban nature (demonstrations for saving parks, protests against clearing public gardens and demolishing courtyard for the sake of infill construction).

The most interesting results from the questionnaire data were obtained by the analysis of relations among different choices made by the respondents, which let us define the solidarity, activism and altruism coefficients (cf. Table 5).

Table 5

Solidarity, Activism and Altruism of the Respondents

No.		Solidarity		Activism		Altruism	
		2002	2014	2002	2014	2002	2014
1	Under 30	0.11	0.06	0.32	0.28	0.01	0.01
2	30-60 years old	0.09	-0.06	0.22	0.27	0.04	-0.02
3	Over 60	0.23	-0.2	0.26	0.17	0.11	-0.002

The preliminary results show that the residents of the Nizhny Novgorod region are becoming less socially oriented and involved. While in 2002 the mean score of solidarity (the respondent's admitting that the majority's opinion coincided with their own) of all age groups was positive in 2014 the older group had the smaller solidarity. The mean of altruism coefficient became lower, while the activism factor is keeping its value. We believe that in general the city residents are still active, individualistically active, i.e. their activism is more likely to be egoistic than altruistic.

In the previous data of the year 2002, a significant part of the sample were aged residents embodying the so-called "Soviet person": they grew up and lived most of their lives in the Soviet period of the Russian history. This sub-group gave the most positive results of social involvement and social commitment (high scores for solidarity, activism and altruism coefficients). Starting from the nineties of the past

century, Nizhny Novgorod retired people constituted an important part of the city's protests. "New cohort" of the elderly, according to the preliminary data, does not have such a potential for social activism.

The middle-aged residents, who grew up in the 90s, are egoistic but active, focused on solving their own problems. In the past 12 year this group of residents had "lost" its focus on others (solidarity and altruism factors are becoming lower), but the activism focused "on themselves" got a higher value. Young people, both in 2002 and 2014, are moderately egoistic and active in reaching their goals.

Conclusion

Theorizing the results of the 2002 study, we actively used the ideas of L.Molm on the role of reciprocity in solidarity, where reciprocity is explained as the result of a specifically structured social exchange with the types of social activities and their products between dyadic and network partners. Such an exchange may be unilateral, bilateral or indirect (generalized); while by L.Molm generalized reciprocal exchanges produce tighter integrative connections among the participants compared to any other form of direct exchange.

Back at that time basing on the age indicator, we explained the positive ageing dynamics in the pro-social factors of the respondents by their social experience. According to this idea, the elderly are the most active participants of the generalized reciprocal exchanges and they should have higher factors for solidarity and altruism. Similar ideas were put forward by other scholars¹³.

Analysis of data collected in 2014 demonstrates that the social and psychological paths of social development can be changed by the economic and political factors. For example, E.Midlarsky and E.Kakhana showed that the elderly oriented at altruism do not have any depression symptoms. Presumably, a reverse situation is possible: destructive factors (e.g. from the political or economic spheres) dispel the belief in the reciprocity of social exchanges, lead to the increase in depression symptoms and lower the orientation at altruism.

Besides, the respondents' thinking of themselves as different from the other residents and the declared social distance do not mean that in reality the resident will not show solidarity. As it is proved by numerous socio-psychological studies, affirmations and practices (behavior) may be different.

At the present time the study is continuing, therefore presented results are intermediate.

¹³ Midlarski, Elisabeth, Kahana, Eva. 2007. "Altruism, Well-Being and Mental Health in Late Life". In: Altruism and Health. Perspectives of Empirical Research, ed. Stephen G. Post. Oxford University Press

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