

Specifics of modernization in Russia's regions



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Abstract. The article analyzes the specifics of modernization in the Russian regions. The author studies modernization in connection with globalization, that is, with the formation of global networks, high-tech core and archaic periphery. The article shows the main trends of modernization in the Russian regions, identifies the role of local government in their formation. In addition, it reveals a number of specific features of modernization in Russia; in particular, a complex combination of a protective attitude towards innovation and focus on development in local communities. Besides, the article pays special attention to the role of traditional value orientations in the decision making process at the local level.

Key words: modernization, global networks, local communities, protective attitudes, value orientations.

This paper presents some findings of a research into local communities. The research was carried out by the Sector for the Study of Socio-Cultural Development of Russia's Regions at IS RAS in the Nizhny Novgorod, Ivanovo, Samara, Sverdlovsk, and Tambov oblasts in the spring–summer of 2013¹.

The main methods of data collection included in-depth interviews with representatives of regional and local authorities, non-governmental organizations and with local residents; these data were supplemented by the analysis of documents and publications in local and regional mass media and on the Internet.

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One of the objectives of the study was to identify the role of governance at the local level in modernization processes. In this regard, first of all it was necessary to determine the category of modernization and the criteria that help detect it in the Russian regions. Conceptualization of modernization in relation to the conditions of our country is one of the most acute issues in contemporary Russian sociology.

Various interpretations of modernization are united by its understanding as an achievement by society of the condition of modernity (the modern or postmodern condition) in all its spheres through technological, institutional, structural, and value changes. The question of what can be considered modern society remains open. Most often it is associated with competition, the value of personality, people's rights and freedoms, developed legal state and civil society, political and economic freedoms [1]. We think that these qualities were inherent in capitalism at the earlier stages of its development. However, it appears that the current situation allows us at this stage of research to consider modernization in a slightly different way, putting controversial issues aside.

Currently, modernization is inextricably linked with globalization. N.P. Tikhonova characterizes this situation as follows: "The openness of the new world and the intensification of various forms of horizontal links put an end to the enclave forms of development, which Russia has been implementing until recently [3]. Globalization leaves no time and chance to catch up and outrun, to develop by growing the institutions of democracy and

economic freedom inherent in modern times. Global flows, networks and nodes, in which the life of the society is built in accordance with the requirements of the monopolized market and high technology, form rapidly and cross national borders [2, 4]. The space outside is losing any economic and social value, other than the source of raw materials and manpower.

The formation of modernization processes of the specified type was revealed in the studied regions. We should emphasize that high-tech nodes of global networks have not been formed there. Besides GAZ Group (former Gorky automobile plant) that produces trucks and buses, Nizhny Novgorod partially preserved its high-tech industry, because military electronics in the Soviet period was a well-developed sphere in the city. At the same time, Arzamas, which is one of the centers of military production is, admittedly, in decline. The companies, which, according to our respondents, could become modernization centers, are shutting down; the university that once used to train highly qualified personnel for the military industry is now deteriorating.

Nevertheless, the structuring of the province according to the globalist pattern manifests itself quite clearly. For instance, the weaving production in Ivanovo has been completely eliminated, former factories turned into giant warehouses for textiles from China, Turkey, and India. There emerged a lot of small garment enterprises that produce finished products from these textiles and provide jobs for women. It should be noted that small and medium business is present almost in every sphere, despite

serious problems caused partly by high taxes and lack of government support, and also by relentless competition with large Russian business. However, their underlying causes are also associated with the globalization of the economy. It is almost impossible to compete with the Chinese dumping, unless the business serves its production (wholesale and retail trade of Chinese consumer goods, Ivanovo garment enterprises that use Chinese materials and so on).

Cheap food imports, according to one of our respondents, has become an obstacle to the development of farming, which was once very important, especially in the Russian Chernozem region: *“The main problem is that imported products are much cheaper than local ones; this is the damage not only to agricultural producers, but also to every citizen, because we can be left without food, the supplies from abroad stop. Small farming enterprises find agricultural production unprofitable; they shift to another business, all our villages are deserted. We receive no government support in this sphere, although our region is engaged in agriculture”*. Besides, according to a member of the Tambov Oblast Society of Beekeepers, it is difficult to sale the products of small producers, particularly in agriculture, because trading networks do not accept their goods, and trading in the markets and fairs does not provide sufficient space for business development”.

One also marks the expansion of Moscow-based capital, which some respondents call *“internal globalization”* and evaluate it negatively: *“Outsiders do not know local specifics; they do not care about the region and its culture”*. Local business is unable to compete with newcomers.

The main economic agents in agriculture are large agro-industrial holdings that develop deserted farmland, build modern cattle-breeding complexes and sow the field with grain crops resistant to weeds and pests. The work in the holding enterprises does not require permanent residence in the village (employees go to work daily by bus – a kind of internal shift work). The main problem of the modern village is not alcoholism, as it is usually presented in the media, but the migration of working-age population to the cities, the disappearance of the village as an economic and socio-cultural phenomenon, and its transformation into a dacha community at best.

Thus, small and medium business, contrary to expectations and hopes, has not become the basis of the region’s development. Modernization is carried out in the framework of global flows, based primarily on large monopolistic capital.

At the same time, there are small towns that have managed to preserve their production: for example, a weaving plant in Shuya (Ivanovo Oblast) or a knitting factory in Rasskazovo (Tambov Oblast). The district center Pavlovo on the Oka River in the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast can be considered the most telling example. The town has a sustainably functioning plant that produces buses of small and middle class (PAZ); the increase of public procurement has boosted the work of military enterprises.

But perhaps the best example of contemporary modernization can be found in the flow of labor migration, oriented exclusively toward global nodes, i.e. regional centers and Moscow. According to the respondents, almost every family has a man,

who works on a rotational basis in Moscow as taxi driver, builder, and, more often, guard in an office or shop. This form of employment provides the development of local business, as the wages of rotational workers create and maintain the demand on the regional and local markets of goods and services.

This study shows that the main subject of this form of modernization is the federal government. It clones the model of the global world with its networks, flows and territories that are not lucky enough to get into them. Thus, the construction of new health centers, equipped with modern equipment, was accompanied by the reduction of places in the district hospitals and the closure of feldsher-midwife stations.

High technology that is developing in global cities, requires specific qualifications; compliance with technological discipline is their main component. An employee should have a sustainable skill of obeying the rules without pondering on their nature and purpose, which is contrary to the Russian tradition of education built on explanation and understanding. We emphasize that in modern conditions this applies not only to workers employed in the assembly-line production, but to everyone, including managers themselves. The reason for this lies in the division of labor and its manufacturability; a prerequisite for effective functioning of any system is found in sequential execution of definite actions. A test system for knowledge assessment and preparation for it is focused on the formation of technological discipline.

This innovation is strictly enforced by the federal center; teachers and school principals avoid discussing the unified state exam, or

note that it has its advantages such as external evaluation of school activities necessary for the development of the educational process, expanded opportunities for graduates to enter the most prestigious universities in the country. However, their real attitude to the reform can be traced according to their careful statements about its shortcomings, and also according to the responses of students who openly say that they are not taught to think, expressing, obviously, the viewpoint of families and teachers.

The federal center also introduces computerization into the educational process, ousting elderly teachers, who are considered the most qualified. Most of them are unable to pass the exam on computer literacy and cannot continue working. This removes one of the obstacles to the development of the education system complying with the demands of modernization.

The policy pursued by the center is practically unambiguous; it is much harder to determine the position and role of regional and district authorities in these processes, and also the role of other actors involved in decision making at the local level. We were able to identify two main groups of administrative attitudes and actions based on them in connection with modernization.

1. *Focus on modernization.* A relatively small number of regional and local managers fully support the “general line” of the federal government. They have the very technological discipline and willingness to comply with the orders that is necessary for the implementation of innovation change. A representative of the administration in one of the regions has voiced clearly the very idea of a modern

model of modernization: *“Everything is fine in our districts. We have a new system of medical care, but the population does not want to accept this system. The people can accept it, if they fall ill seriously and need qualified medical aid. In most cases they just need to spend some time at hospital close to their home rather than be treated. In the Soviet times this scheme worked, but we did not have such technology, which we now use, except for surgery and ophthalmology. Everything else was at the low level. Now we have established regional centers with modern medical equipment, qualified experts and modern operations and procedures. We bring a patient to these centers depending on his or her disease. In the case of stroke or heart attack, we work only according to this system. It takes up to two hours to get to a hospital, and the critical period of time for patients with stroke and heart attack is six hours”*. Note that the system of feldsher-midwife stations and district hospitals was not designed for carrying out complex medical operations and procedures. It provided residents of remote villages with skilled medical treatment in more simple cases, preventing complex cases, during childbirth, when even two hours (actually more, considering the time of arrival of an ambulance) can prove fatal. However, such a policy has a social base, despite the refusal of the population to accept it. It is, first of all, the residents, who are focused on working in the regional center, in Moscow, and, if possible, abroad, in any place that provides a higher level of comfort and consumption. However, according to our respondents from different regions, the number of people who change their place of residence is not large. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons for the fact

that the goals to carry out modernization and unconditional execution of orders are not often observed at the local level.

2. *Preservation strategy*. The activities of the majority of regional and local actors, including regional and district administrations, aim to preserve and develop the local community. They see danger in innovations that destroy the community (urban and rural), its values, and the personality as it was formed in the Russian culture. This opinion was formulated most succinctly by a representative of the administration of one of the districts: *“We watch TV in order to see what more has been planned, and to be ready for it. We will introduce innovations so that we will preserve everything that is our own, and nobody will find this out”*. At the same time a necessary component of their strategy is orientation toward development and progress. One of the surveyed school principals expressed a common viewpoint: *“I don’t know, maybe it would be better if you didn’t put it down. We can’t be in a constant development process. School should be strong, first of all, in its tradition, its basis. We can add something, upgrade something, but the basis must be preserved. If there is stability, there will be development”*. In their opinion, modernization should develop the existing social integrity.

Innovations introduced from outside are adopted, if they do not contradict the traditional understanding of development. New forms of self-organization of local communities are developed with support from the district administration. For example, the villages in one of the districts have formed “parent patrols”, whose primary purpose

is to prevent drug and alcohol abuse and involvement of children and adolescents in criminal activity. Some districts establish new forms of children's summer recreation, such as camps for children under house administrations and housing cooperatives.

Despite the depressive 1990s and a lingering lack of resources, the districts managed to preserve libraries, museums, music and art schools, and culture centers. The head of the Department of Culture of one of the district centers in the early 1990s was able to convince the head of the district's administration about the necessity to repair the library: *"At that time we desperately needed a central library. It was situated in the city center, in a two-storied mansion. The library required a new building, the area was small, and there was not enough space. So, a new one was built. For ten years now our library is the best in the oblast, and equipped with everything brand-new"*.

Music and art schools, according to the decision of the federal center, were united into schools of arts, but in some cases, due to the activity of the entities, they continue working separately from each other: *"We didn't have room for an art school. And our school is old and has its own traditions. We decided not to combine music and art schools, because each of them has its own image. The moment came when it was necessary to convince the administration that we needed a new building for the art school. And the building, in which the music school is located, received an addition. The main building has two floors, and the addition has three floors. It was in the 1990s, about 17 years ago. It was very difficult because we had to use our own resources, but the plans were implemented"*.

The attempts to rebuild the traditional socio-cultural basis of communities cause counteractions aimed to preserve this basis. The changes in the assessments of the Great Patriotic War that appear in the media and in works of art are perceived painfully. The associations of the "children of war" are created in some districts; their participants took up the activities of the veterans, who cannot be involved in this any longer due to the state of their health. In part, these organizations become sort of clubs for the elderly, but their main task is to tell schoolchildren about the war, to counteract the imposed interpretations of historical events.

Much attention is paid to the museums of the Great Patriotic War, and military exhibitions in museums of regional studies; tours for schoolchildren are organized on a regular basis.

The preservation of history is one of the most important components of the strategy under consideration. This strategy supports museums even under the budget resources shortage; it also respects all historical periods without exception. In the village you can see an exhibition, dedicated to the Red Army commander Mikhail Frunze, to the tragedy of the Tambov Rebellion (Antonov's mutiny in the Tambov Oblast), the reconstruction of the interior of a Soviet room, which is very popular: the citizens bring old things there, they go there and recall what it used to be like in their childhood. The residents of Arzamas love and read Arkady Gaidar. The district administration preserves the memory of the writer; it also successfully cooperates with the Orthodox Church.

As a result, the district administration and, in some cases, regional government, creates the network, the main centers of which are schools, libraries, museums and houses of culture. This network successfully counteracts modernization transformations that are destructive to the districts' culture. For instance, the Ministry of Culture made an attempt to organize the houses of culture according to the German model: in Germany they exist solely due to the self-organization of citizens who come and do what they want. The attempt failed – professionals who teach classes in groups, clubs and theatre studios were not dismissed. Similar protests were caused by an attempt to create a library, according to the Western pattern, when people bring and borrow whatever books they want. A professional librarian and a professional culture worker do not simply perform their functions, but they also organize cultural life in the community at a sufficiently high level, and support it in the local community.

The desire to “save and preserve” is especially evident in the desire to maintain cultural life in the fading village: *“Our cultural policy aims to make the real culture available in the village. We invented the whole system of festivals in rural areas, all our teams give a lot of concerts in the village. Few people understand what the arrival of such groups means for the village. They say: we thought that everyone forgot about us. Not long ago we had a concert of the choir named after Rachmaninoff that came to our village; many were puzzled why such a choir with complex music would come to the village; nevertheless, people came and listened*

and were very pleased, the people of different age. Theater, brass music and song festivals – we pay a lot of attention and allocate much money to this sphere of the people's involvement. We have provided the districts with transport, so that the people can go from district to district with their performances; it is a factor that unites the people and the region”.

The federal center in this case is seen as a supplier of resources. All the above can be done primarily through the involvement in its programs, which requires a lot of efforts. It (federal center) is partly hostile, because it is where the attempts to introduce dangerous and disruptive innovations are coming from, which was expressed clearly by our respondents: *“All this modernization, the education is dying, although the money invested is enormous. And everyone is mad as hornet, because no one cared to ask the people themselves... Sometimes it is better not to do as you are told, maybe the matters will settle after a while”.* In some cases, parties are regarded to be the same resource as the federal center: *“We use the support that comes from any party, but vote for “United Russia”, because today it is the only party that can provide real, including financial, assistance”.* Votes are exchanged for the ability to resolve pressing issues for the community; that is how we managed to preserve the feldsher-and-midwife stations (where possible) and even give the functions of hospitals to some of them.

It should be noted that among the actors functioning in the city and the district administration there are people of different age groups, including those who were district heads in the USSR and have experience of

work under the party and Soviet conditions. They are respected, they are considered a kind of community resource, and the people wish them “many happy returns”. These people in most cases are not Communists, they are mostly members of the “United Russia”. But, anyway, they reproduce a socio-cultural reality traditional for the Soviet times, which includes elements previously foreign to it, such as business and the Church. The degree of awareness of this position does not matter, as well as the political orientation of the actors.

This study shows that conservatory actions in the Russian regions prevail over the focus on modernization. They successfully resisted degradation of the Russian communities in the 1990s, not allowing them to sink to really archaic forms of society. Currently, they help to resist the same damaging impact of modernization in its globalist version. Governance at the local level is focused on the social and cultural spheres, and partly – on small business, including farming. This is caused, on the one hand, by the lack of leverage on large capital, on the other hand – by the value of culture and education in the pattern of development that is supported, reproduced and protected by local government.

Local government in this case retains a special tradition of development that shaped historically in Russia, and the Soviet industrialization based on this tradition. This development is based on the culture and historical continuity, on the understanding of the processes, their causes and effects. It does not imply the elimination of values existing in this culture, or the complete functionality

of any activity leading to simplification of human thought. It also does not imply a simplified, institutionalized individualism of modernism and postmodernism, which actually means the atomization of society. At that, personality plays a major role in this version of development.

The model of “protective” management itself is personal; any explicit or implicit opposition to destructive tendencies depends entirely on the presence of an actor. Institutions and structures play a subordinate role in it; like political orientation, they are used depending on the defined goals. In the words of one of our respondents who is a senior official in the regional administration the tasks should be solved at any cost, which confirms protective and mobilization nature of management.

This relative independence from institutions provides a certain degree of autonomy in relation to the federal center, the ability to survive without its support and even to confront some of his decisions. Ultimately, it is the village that can preserve the possibility of alternative modernization. But this is very relative. It is obvious that the Russian localities cannot implement their own version of modernization. They do not have sufficient resources to do this, and, in those areas that do have them, global entities successfully operate and global flows are formed. Therefore, here we speak more about maintaining the development potential that has different properties and a different vector than building a new world of high-tech centers and forgotten settlements. This potential is of particular value in the current situation. First, globalization does not provide the majority

of the Russian population with an opportunity to be included in the high-tech society, because the number of such nodes is limited, and they are located mostly outside Russia. The streams are narrow, they create too few jobs and, as we have shown, do not employ

local residents. For this reason, the prevention of social and cultural degradation remains the main task of the local government. Second, the global postmodernism is unstable, and its lack of options is questionable; therefore, an alternative may prove much-in-demand.

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