

Quality of the population as a major driving force of systemic modernization of the Russian society



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Abstract. The article analyzes the state of the quality of life in modern Russia as a result of the increase in the standard of living and quality of life and as a major modernization factor. The author presents the indicators and trends describing the change in the quality of the population. The article proposes to combine the classical patronage (extensive) approach and the participatory (intensive) formation of a “participatory society” in the implementation of social policy. According to the author, one of the main directions of this approach is the redirection of demographic policy from the quantity to the quality of the population, and to the accumulation and realization of human potential.

Key words: quality of population, social policy, extensive and intensive approaches, social paternalism, “participatory society”.

The majority of scientific works on socio-economic issues deal with the standard of living and quality of life, social inequality, poverty, and demography. The subsistence level, minimum wage (officially rated for some average “homunculus”), social support, pension provision, distribution relationships— the life of every person depends on how these and other issues are addressed. But, despite the fact that we recognize the unconditional basic significance of these issues, we should

not ignore the quality of the population, which is an issue equally important for the development of Russia’s society.

We agree with Pitirim Sorokin who wrote in 1922: “The fate of any society depends primarily on the properties of its members. A society of idiots or incompetent people will never become a prosperous society. A society of talented and strong-willed individuals will inevitably create more advanced forms of community living... Careful study of the rise and fall

of entire peoples shows that it happened mainly due to a drastic qualitative change in the composition of their population in one way or the other" [13].

It is the quality of the population that is the main strategic resource for the development of society, the main result of the rise in the standard of living and quality of life. The rise in the standard of living and quality of life does not have any directly proportional correlation with the improvement of the population quality. Here we see the functional dependence akin to the so-called Easterlin paradox (Easterlin, Richard), when happiness (a feeling of subjective well-being) grows rapidly along with income only up to a certain point of saturation. Residents of poorer countries often feel happier than people in rich countries. That is why, a concept of "happiness economics" is developed, and research into the happiness index is carried out in more than 140 countries.

It is logical that Russian President V.V. Putin highlights the strengthening of human potential in his policy statements: "We should build our social, economic, immigration, humanitarian, cultural, educational, environmental and legislative policies around the promotion of human capital in Russia – not just during election campaigns, but for the long term, a historical perspective in the true sense of the term". [11]. "Russia's main strength in this and future centuries will lie in its educated, creative, physically and spiritually healthy people, rather than natural resources or nuclear weapons" [4].

However, even if it is recognized openly that the development of positive abilities of an individual is a priority, in practice it

often happens that there is a shortage of opportunities for the formation and implementation of these abilities. Economic determinism, for which the Bolsheviks were so frequently criticized, became the main ideological principle of neoliberalism. Therefore, many scientists point out a strange similarity between the activities of the Bolsheviks' activities aimed to establish the Soviet power and the neoliberal activities aimed to implant capitalism in Russia. For example, a British sociologist Archie Brown asserts that among the Russian radical Democrats there are a lot of "neo-Bolsheviks" who act under the principle "the end justifies the means" [19]. A.S. Panarin makes a direct analogy between the Bolsheviks and the neoliberals, believing that "the victory of the Bolsheviks, just as the victory of modern "liberalism", is associated with the superiority of an organized minority that among other things has powerful foreign support, over the fragmented provincial majority" [8]. Both are based on the "absurd state of mind" (J. Ortega y Gasset), when people are "only concerned with their own well-being. As they do not see, behind the benefits of civilization, marvels of invention and construction which can only be maintained by great effort and foresight, they imagine that their role is limited to demanding these benefits peremptorily, as if they were natural rights". [7].

Based on this "absurd state of mind", the reformers scarcely appreciate the positive and great things that were part of the former type of societal system. For them it is only an object that must be radically changed; as for the generations of people with their "great effort and foresight" spent for the development of this object, they are

almost a natural givenness, human material ready to undergo social experiment.

A set of ideas, political slogans, and myths that contradict each other and are situational in nature serve as a kind of “surrogate ideology”. A worldview of “paradoxical man” is formed on the basis of social chimeras that are endowed with multicultural charm. The main role is given to patchiness, fragmentation, substitution of its components at the whim of an individual. Today you are an advocate of communism, tomorrow – an adherent of capitalism, and the day after tomorrow you support fascism; and it is quite all right, because all these labels are supposed to have no real meaning (or all of them have the same meaning), and after all, man has the right to search for identity. In “surrogate ideology” one can find a wide scope for any frills; but this chaotic, eclectic set of ideas is usually structured skillfully, so that at the level of values it could be possible to neutralize the possibility of consolidation of the people as a sovereign.

Some representatives of the modern Russian elite again feel like they were the avant-garde of “the entire progressive mankind”, and they try to impose their “advanced” opinion of the key issues of national development on the majority of the citizens; for instance, they urge to move forward by the example of European and American civilization, as it was proposed by sociologist B. Grushin. This, in his opinion, requires the abandonment of “*Russism in general, Russism as such*”, i.e., to speak not only about the change of political and economic “outfit”, but also about fundamental changes in the very nature of the people, their habits, life practices, mentality and psychology”

[6]. J.T. Toshchenko notes that the entire history of the 20th century did not give more wrong and primitive forecasts than those that were made in the perestroika period and the beginning of the 1990s [17]. Let me remind you one of the forecasts by Boris Yeltsin: “The situation will remain bad for everyone for about six months; after that the prices will lower, the consumer market will be filled with goods, and by the autumn of 1992 the economy will be stabilized and the people’s lives will gradually improve” [5]. The Nobel prizewinner J. Stiglitz wrote: “Russia has gotten the worst of all possible worlds – an enormous decline in output and an enormous increase in inequality” [15].

Back in 1990 S.Shatalin, N.Petrakov and other authors of the program called “500 days” confirmed that all the existing structures were unsustainable, the fact that “up to a certain point was masked by extensive use of human and natural resources, but even this type of economic development has exhausted itself in the 1960s” [10]. The modern resource-based economy is no less exhausted.

And the main thing is that during the years of consecutive shocks the quality of the population has deteriorated: people’s health, education, cultural level, working ability must be restored. Today there are no more illusions concerning the inevitability of progress; economic growth does not automatically solve problems of social development. The people appeared to be a resource as finite as nature; and the experience of our country, whose leaders were thoughtlessly and blasphemously trying to “catch up and overtake”, suggests that we need to agree on the boundaries of reforms that are not to be crossed.

Physical, mental, and social health of Russia’s population arouses great concerns.

Children's health is continuously and increasingly deteriorating: the health of each new generation is worse than the health of the previous one [12]. The analysis of the results of a longitudinal study (1995–2010) of child health and development, carried out by ISEDT RAS in the Vologda Oblast, leads to similar conclusions [18].

There is an ongoing process of gradual “rejuvenation” of child disability: it occurs both in absolute value and in terms of disability level. The share of children of the 1st health group with no deviation from all the health criteria selected for assessment has declined from 49 to 9% in the period of 25 years.

Social health of the population, defined by indicators of deviant behavior, often exceeds their maximum critical (threshold) values. Deviant behavior has become a large-scale phenomenon and it directly affects the growth of mortality, primarily among working-age men. Human losses due to accidents, poisonings, homicides and suicides are like death tolls during a war. For example, according to the WHO, 20 suicides per 100 thousand population is considered extremely critical. In Russia this threshold value in working-age men was 2–4 times greater.

Russia ranks first in the world by the number of smokers: the share is 39% of the adult population (2011). According to the Ministry of Health, about 288 thousand people die prematurely from tobacco use. As a result, Russia's economy loses about 1.5 trillion rubles annually.

More than 2 million patients with alcoholism are subject to regular medical check-up, 3.3 million Russians have mental health problems. According to various estimates, the number of Russians who

regularly consume narcotic and toxic substances is over 3 million people. It is noteworthy that there is a “rejuvenation” of all forms of social diseases, and drug addiction is by 80% a disease of the Russians aged under 30. According to Rosstat, over 100 thousand people aged 15–30 die from drug abuse every year in Russia. Because of these premature deaths the society annually loses about 300 billion rubles of its investment in education and training, let alone profit lost due to the loss of workers¹ [1].

A team of researchers at the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences has developed an index of macropsychological state of society, and its value is far from optimal (*table*).

Judging by the forecasts, mortality from the diseases of the nervous system and sensory organs in the 21st century will significantly outstrip the diseases of the circulatory system, which today rank first among causes of death.

A negative trend is observed in the reduction of the level (quality) of education. A statement of V. Mau published in 2000 that “our problem consists in redundancy of education and natural resources” [2] regarding education is not so relevant today. The reduction of social obligations of the state is accompanied by commercialization of health care and education. In 2011, according to Rosstat, 15% of the Russians aged 15 and older could not get medical care because they could not pay for it. The proportion of students who pay for

¹ The cost of living in Russia and in other countries is growing. See: Aganbegyan A. Skol'ko stoit zhizn' cheloveka v Rossii? [What is the Cost of a Human Life in Russia?]. *Ekonomicheskaya politika* [Economic Policy], 2014, no. 1, pp. 54–66.

Macropsychological state of society

Indicator	Indicator's value	Ranking of Russia according to this indicator
Mortality from homicide per 100,000 inhabitants	16.7	1st place in Europe and the CIS
Mortality from suicide per 100,000 inhabitants	27.1	2nd place in Europe and the CIS after Lithuania, on the same level as Belarus and Kazakhstan
Mortality from accidental alcohol poisoning	16.9	1st place in Europe and the CIS
Mortality from road traffic accidents per 100,000 inhabitants	16.9	2nd place in Europe and the CIS after Latvia
The number of children left without parental care, per 100,000 inhabitants	88.8	2nd place in Eastern Europe and the CIS after Estonia
The number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants	5	1st place among the countries with developed economy and economy in transition
The number of abortions per 1,000 women (aged 15–49)	36	1st place in Eastern Europe and the CIS
Proportion of children born out-of-wedlock, %	26.9	13th place in the Eastern Europe and CIS
Gini Coefficient (the index of income concentration)	0.422	1st place among the countries with developed economy and economy in transition
Corruption Perceptions Index, 2009 (from 0 to 10 points; the higher the score, the lower the level of corruption)	2.2	146th place in the world (along with Ukraine, Kenya, Cameroon, Ecuador, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone) out of 180 countries
Source: Zhuravlev A.L., Yurevich A.V. <i>Makropsikhologicheskoe sostoyanie sovremennogo rossiiskogo obshchestva</i> [Macropsychological State of Modern Russian Society]. Moscow, 2012.		

tuition increased to 30% in the system of secondary vocational education (2010), and to 63% in the system of higher professional education.

From the point of view of assessing the cultural level and values of the Russians, the accusations of most people are sometimes excessive. Some authors write that they have not been taught to think, that they “live their lives like vegetables” and produce nothing except for their own kind [16]. The people often hear accusations that they are prone to laziness and paternalism. This is what D.A. Medvedev said in his policy article “Come on, Russia!” in 2009: “The desire to “build oneself” and to achieve personal success step-by-step is not our national habit. Hence the lack of initiative and new ideas, unresolved issues, low quality of public debate and criticism. Public consent and support

are usually expressed by saying nothing. Objections are very often emotional and scathing, but at the same time superficial and irresponsible”.

The accusations that Russian citizens are prone to paternalism are actively supported by many politicians. For example, in 2009 N. Belykh, the then Governor of the Kirov Oblast, said: “One of the troubles, which I consider to be the major one, oddly enough, more important than corruption and economic backwardness, is paternalistic attitudes in the society”. I. Yurgens, Chairman of the Management Board of the Institute for Contemporary Development, expressed his opinion just as definitely and openly in an interview in 2010: “There exist archaic and paternalistic attitudes in the majority of the population. By the way, this is what distinguishes our citizens from the Europeans. Such attitudes can be done away with only by 2025”.

There can be more and more examples of such scathing judgments, but the situation is clear enough: part of the modern political elite wants to explain the modest results (putting it mildly) of ruling the country in the turbulent 1990s and 2000s by the grave legacy of tsarism, Sovietism and by a weak capacity of the Russian people to undertake vigorous social action. Perhaps, there is a germ of truth in this, but it is obviously small. The allegations concerning the broadness of paternalistic sentiments do not receive confirmation.

First, Academician D.S. L'vov pointed out the futility of the conflict between paternalism and liberalism. We can talk about the extent of using paternalism, which makes the functioning of a certain public sector more efficient. Second, reliance on the state support became long ago the privilege of a small part of Russians represented mostly by old people. According to many indicators of the scale of alienation, the mass consciousness of the population perceives the federal and regional authorities as a partner (at best) that should be influenced more through force than through persuasion or requests. The Russians, we mean the residents of all the federal districts and representatives of every age group, have a high level of consent with regard to the statement "the government understands only the language of force".

Analysis of sociological research findings leads to the conclusion that the mass consciousness, especially that of young people, is dominated by orientation toward social activity, personal success and local consolidation. Apathy and immaturity of the population is gradually replaced by

social energy, willingness to protect one's own interests, relying primarily not on public support but on their own strength². If we take negative characteristics of paternalism such as dependency, archaic clannishness, cult of the leader, then perhaps part of the ruling elite, rather than the majority of the population would find it useful to change their mentality and psychology radically.

The fact that Russia's citizens prefer "mild" forms of protest and their relative reluctance to participate even in such legal actions as protest marches and strikes, is explained by many reasons. Let us consider just two of them. On the one hand, it is the pressure on the part of the administration and employers, which makes the citizens excessively cautious in the choice of protest forms. Fear of job loss continues to increase among the population and it ranks first in the list of pressing social issues. Besides, the people lack trust in "organizers" of social protest such as trade unions and political parties, and their self-organization skills are inertial and poor. On the other hand, the mass protests of 1991 and 1993 are associated in the historical memory of the majority of Russians with political chaos and rampant crime. The "fear of chaos" that people feel against the background of the events in Ukraine allows the government to position itself as a "pillar of stability" and to rely on the support of the society in their efforts to restore order. The situation may change with the deepening of the crisis,

² We provide the analysis of the data obtained during the all-Russian sociological surveys conducted in 2007 (n=7119), in 2009 (n=2110) and in 2011 (n=1531), under the supervision of RAS Academician G.V. Osipov, and RAS Corresponding Members V.L. Schultz and V.V. Lokosov.

the increase of natural and man-made disasters, the violation of life-support systems and the inability of mainly local authorities to cope with the consequences of all this. Under the circumstances, the people will conclude that the situation cannot get any worse, and they will shift to more active manifestations of protest.

Healthy lifestyle is coming into fashion and into the lifestyle of the Russians; we see the revival of the GTO (“Ready for Labor and Defense”) standards along with other positive changes in the socio-cultural sphere. At present, the loss of health often leads a person to social bottom. An individual with bad habits finds it difficult to win a tough job competition. A new work culture and discipline is introduced gradually. It becomes “indecent” to be in poor physical condition.

It is necessary to take into consideration the ageing of the population. According to Rosstat forecasts, the reduction in the number of working-age people will have reached 11.6 million by 2025. This difficult situation has two possible outcomes: either to carry on attracting millions of unskilled labor migrants in Russia, which aggravates the country’s technological backwardness, or to upgrade the economy intensively on an innovation basis. The research by the RAS Institute of Social and Economic Studies of Population leads to the conclusion that the increase in the number of older people who still have their resource potential does not lead to increase in the dependency burden neither for the family nor for the society in general. The opinion that older people should be considered mainly as social “dead weight” is deeply flawed even in the context of economic determinism. Therefore, research into the third age, the

study of the people of this age as a factor in modernization of the modern society, is very promising [14].

We believe that a person’s position in the society as a whole, including the state, is the cornerstone of scientific understanding and explanation of social reality; that it is necessary to make analytical developments more “anthropologically” oriented. Political, economic and other expediency, which are pointed out as arguments supporting the viewpoint that the people’s interests can be considered temporarily as being of secondary importance, as a rule, lead to proving the people’s inferiority and marginality, which ultimately leads the society to another negative experience of reforms and further on – to new shocks.

Most of the forecasts (for example, the forecast by the Ministry of Economic Development) say that there will be the 1–2% growth of GDP in 2015–2016, which creates difficulties for the implementation of social policy and family policy – its most important component. The fact that people may have to “pull in their belts” in the current conflict of interests between different population groups can increase social tensions in the society. A series of reforms in healthcare, education, science and culture has not yet led to productive results. In addition, the statements that we have managed to overcome negative trends in the demographic sphere are probably premature.

Managerial practice is dominated by quantitative and technocratic approaches to the reorganization of the societal system. The ongoing adjustment of the priority development directions of science, technology and engineering in the Russian Federation and of the list of critical

technologies virtually ignores social sciences and the humanities. Unfortunately, non-economic factors including population quality, development of economic, social and demographic areas get little attention. Max Scheler in his article "Population problems as philosophical questions of *Weltanschauung*" (1921) argues that, in addition to reproduction capability (which was severely undermined in the post-war Germany due to the large-scale distribution of prostitution, STDs, impotence, etc.), there is also the will to procreation, which is determined by the worldview of an individual. The analysis of the obtained sociological data leads to the conclusion that the desire to have the definite number of children depends much more on the need for children than on the perception of the quality of life, i.e., the and the worldview and the will to procreation remain dominant [3].

None of the issues concerning the improvement of population quality has been solved completely. The planned further commercialization of the social sphere leads to the degradation of human potential that is the major factor in systemic modernization of the society. The split of the society moves into the socio-cultural dimension.

It would probably be most effective to respond to these and other social risks and

threats by implementing the participatory approach (the formation of the "participatory society") and integrating it in the public administration and local government to improve the quality of life and the quality of the population itself [9]. On the one hand, under the market economy it is wrong to pin all hopes on state authorities; on the other hand, the issues concerning the improvement of the quality of life of the population, and poverty alleviation, in particular, cannot be solved only at the expense of the citizens. The transition from the extensive (paternalistic, patronage) to the intensive social policy that aims not only to support the needy, but also to maintain and build the ability of an individual to learn continuously, to use new social practices, and to discover and implement one's potential will promote the successful development of the social state, and consolidation and cooperation between the authorities, business and population. In demographic policy this transition means its redirection from the quantity to the quality of the population, to the accumulation and rational use of human potential; the adjustment of migration policy taking into account strategic interests of the indigenous peoples of Russia; the restoration of traditional values of the Russians concerning family life and desire to have many children.

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