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Religious identity empirical studies in a socio-cultural space of the Republic of Karelia

O Tolstoguzov, M Pitukhina

Russian Science Academy, Petrozavodsk, Russia

maria.pitukhina@gmail.com

Abstract. The article deals with the empirical study results of religious identity in region's socio-cultural space. The aim of the study is to understand how sub ethnos in terms of modern challenges would be able to maintain its recognizable ethnocultural profile – so called "gestalt". By the example of a multinational sub-ethnic group at the Republic of Karelia (both northern and border region) an attempt was made to evaluate public relations stability structure. Thus evaluated ethnic and civilized identity would include a combination of complex attributes that reflect both self-identification method and other ethnocultural groups perceptions (and attitudes). A hypothesis was also suggested that social geosystem possesses social relations structure perceived both in temporal and spatial dimensions. In particular, attitudes towards other ethnocultural groups and religions were scrutinized. Thus there were distinguished - the core - together with the variable part that evolves under the influence of challenges and internal causes. Invariants (empirically identified features that remain relatively unchanged in temporal and spatial dimensions) as well as region's socio-cultural space inversions were revealed.

1. Introduction

Sociocultural space is a space of cultural norms and values, cross-cultural communications. It is important to perceive how local community under the influence of modern challenges would be able to maintain social relations homeostasis. The aim of research is to understand how a subethnos would be able to maintain its recognizable ethnocultural profile - "gestalt". This term implies "structure", "image", "form", "integrity". However, this is not just a sum of traits, but possession of a certain recognizability, translated identity. At the same time we are trying to reveal some patterns on a selected example and make a generalization on the effect factors influencing subethnos evolution.

The Republic of Karelia was chosen as a research object both authentic and typological. Firstly, the republic is a multinational subethnos, secondly, it is a border region, and thirdly, northern (and partially Arctic) region. The Arctic (like the entire northern part of Russia) is a traditionally interesting and relevant object from the point of view of its sustainable development [1]. It has specific spatial conditions [2] characterized by uneven urban and rural development of its territories [3], poor population of the territory as well as its settlements' geographical isolation. There are some corresponding problems with human resources also [4]. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account geographical feature and increased importance of current migration call in this regard [5].

As a hypothesis we accept the following statement: civilized, moral, and value systems are not only fundamental characteristics of regional subethnos, but also invariants of a sociocultural space. In particular, we do consider some identification signs manifested in relation to other ethnic groups and



religions. In this case, we shall consider empirically identified features that remain relatively unchanged both in temporal and spatial dimensions as invariants.

2. Research methods

Sociological studies provide information on how sensitive societal changes are including people's lives, positive or negative nature, which directions they move on etc. Evaluated ethnic and ideological identity includes a combination of complex attributes that reflect both methods of self-identification and perceptions of other ethnocultural groups.

Societal space and local communities behavior analysis was carried out in 2016-2017. While constructing the sample, both respondents' gender and age, urban ratio, rural population were taken into account. Number of sample elements with different characteristics was determined in such a way that it corresponded to a total population share. Data of the Federal State Statistics Service for the Republic of Karelia were applied. While conducting the survey, Likert and Thurstone sociological scales were also implemented. The questionnaire survey covered more than 2 000 respondents at the Republic of Karelia.

3. Research results

Geographical position and historical development of Russia and its regions were determined by socio-cultural space construction. In Soviet period, a social order was formed on a certain ideological platform (with recognizable gestalt of a "Soviet man"), which ultimately ensured country's industrial modernization and the World War II victory.

At the same time a special sub-ethnic group was formed in Karelia with certain characteristics, for example, cultural codes that combine with Russian ethnic group as well as special characteristics formed both under traditions and external factors influence. First of all, we should single out two subethnos traits:

- sustainable tolerance has been shaped in relation to other ethnic groups and nationalities (table 1),
- key competence of local population — "cultural navigator" — allowing to mediate with Russian and North European civilizations is clearly manifested (table 2).

Table 1. Respondents' judgments redistribution in relation to interethnic (interfaith) relations, percent

Judgments related to	Positive answer	Negative answer	Difficult to answer
Interethnic relations	67,8	20,2	11,9
Interfaith relations	68,4	11,5	20,0

Positive response in table 1 was obtained by summing up respondents' opinions "relations are good, there is a willingness to cooperate with representatives of different nationalities, ethnocultural groups (faiths, religions)" and "relations are calm, there is no hostility or irritation to representatives of other nationalities, representatives of ethnocultural groups (denominations religions)." A negative answer was obtained by summing up the respondents' opinions "Relations are outwardly calm, but there is internal tension between representatives of different nationalities, ethnocultural groups (faiths, religions)" and "relations are tense, conflicts are possible between representatives of different nationalities, ethnocultural groups (faiths, religions)".

Table 2. Respondents' judgments redistribution, percent

Judgments related to	Positive answer	Negative answer	Difficult to answer
Cooperation with representatives of other nationalities	68,1	21,1	10,9

Conflicts are possible between representatives of other nationalities	22,9	65,9	11,2
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Positive response in table 2 was obtained by summing up respondents' judgments "yes, ready" and "rather yes than no". A negative answer was obtained by summing up respondents opinions "rather no than yes" and "no, not ready".

Regional subethnos dynamics was determined by the following structure components:

- the "core", originally composed of indigenous population (Russians, Karelians, Finns, Vepsians);
- migration waves (migrants flows mainly from the USSR: Belarus, Ukraine, etc. and emigration from other regions).

The "core" has absorbed migrants two times already. The population peak was in 1990 (Fig. 1) - the number has reached 791 000 (January 1, 2019 - 618 000). Migration waves derived from active industrialization policy of the north after the World War II. Kondopoga cascade of hydroelectric power plants, Segezha and Kondopoga pulp and paper mills, Pitkyaranta pulp factory were built. The last wave (both internal migration and external) is associated with construction development in 1977-1983, where the city of Kostomuksha was built (the 64th northern latitude). In such a young city local community has been shaped for several decades already.

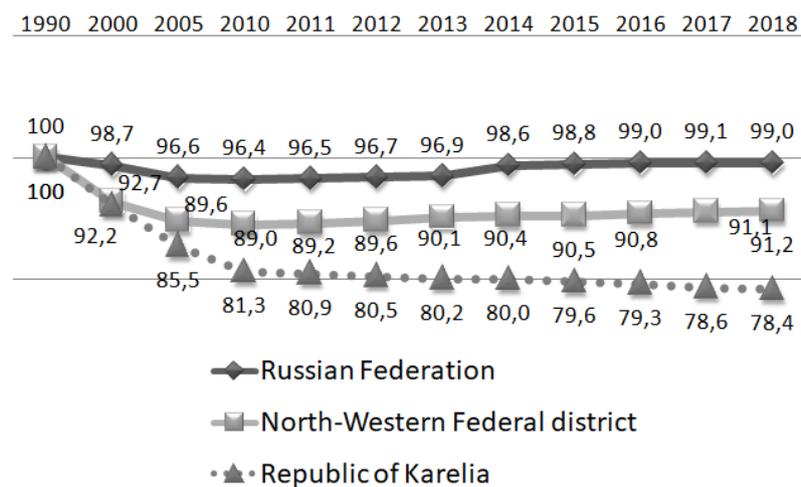


Figure 1. Population change in the Russian Federation, the North-West Federal District, Republic of Karelia, % , 1990-2018.

Table 3 presents some identification signs - attitudes to some other ethnic groups as well as religions at the Republic of Karelia. At the same time respondents coming from urban district of Kostomuksha identified themselves more clearly in relation to the proposed features: only 1-4% found it difficult to answer; 42% spoke out for the fact that national identity is significant (with a regional average value of 17.0%). The positive response in table 3 was obtained by summing up respondents' judgments of "significant importance, along with economic, political and other factors" and "determining value". A negative answer was obtained by summing up respondents answers - "not important" and "insignificant value".

Table 3. Respondents' judgments redistribution in relation to identity, percent.

Judgments related to	Positive answer	Negative answer	Difficult to answer
National identity	17,0	62,9	20,1

Religious identity	12,2	69,1	18,7
National (or religious) identity in social life and public mood influence	14,3	58,7	27,0

4. Research results evaluation

Regionalization is being currently implemented in a system of existing international relations that would include supranational (Euroregions development), state and regional levels [6]. At the same time under constructivism theory it is considered that agents interaction among countries, regions, and cities form a new cross-border reality at both macro- and micro structural levels. A.Wendt points out that nature of international and inter-regional life as determined by beliefs and expectations that agents form about each other; as a result both beliefs and expectations got established in social (not material) structures [7].

This circumstance is important in terms of cross-border and transboundary constructed spaces with specific institutional and sociocultural characteristics (for example, Euroregions). Political systems and their legitimation depend on citizens' support as well as their satisfaction with existing formal and informal institutions [8], [9]. At the same time beliefs regarding management and results are crucial for political systems stability and preservation [10], [11]. Therefore the issue regarding a number of factors determining public participation, democracy, social relations structure naturally arises [12], [13], [14], [15].

We are currently witnessing a new reality formation. Anthropogenic mobiles (movements of people) are increasingly showing the property of a geopolitical tool and, in this regard, are becoming an important factor in relation to border areas, affecting both economy and social sphere. The Republic of Karelia also belongs to such border territories. Migration processes are dependent on social relations structure and according to modern theory of migration cannot be considered in isolation from social, economic and political phenomena in which they occur [16]. This problem has been previously discussed [17]. At the same time, it is highly necessary to continue studying social system structure.

Due to traditional life changes and increase in modern societies' concepts, societies become even more fragmented. As a result, the heterogeneity of life worlds and lifestyle has a strong impact on society. Thus, it matters which ideas about the life world are fixed in people minds.

As for internal reason we consider political regime, the effect of which is evaluated by attitudes towards other ethno-cultural groups and religions. We believe this is important, because in connection with the rejection of gestalt of "Soviet man", internationalism is being transformed through painful processes of national identification into some other quality, and for a long time dominant atheism has been replacing traditional ethnocultural values.

Regional subethnos experiences this process quite painlessly, although separate episodes might happen (for example, in the city of Kondopoga in 2006). In our opinion, tolerance is restored as a regional property of the subethnos.

Atheist propaganda as an essential part of previous ideology was removed from the agenda as a result of the crisis of the 1990s. Let us calculate the 1929 characteristics of the core associated with the identity. According to sociological evaluations carried out in the Republic of Karelia 75% of respondents consider themselves as believers (as in 1929).

We consider this coincidence as not random. Thus, after propaganda ended, the core returned to its nature, its fundamental principles based upon the identity. Moreover, if we take the number of respondents who considered themselves as believers to be 100%, we get the following picture: 91% consider themselves as Orthodox, 1.3% as Catholic, 1.3% as Protestant. Islam is not noticeable in the region. Protestantism is more evenly distributed in a sociocultural space, but it is not as noticeable as it could be due to the proximity of Protestant Finland and rather serious expansion of other cultural codes. Obviously, old neighborhood has developed a stable immunity towards the "Protestant" factor.

5. Duscussion

As a rule empirical studies are conducted either from a macro- or microeconomic point of view [19]. Macro-indicators do not provide sufficient idea of local or individual patterns on migrants and host population behavior.

In sociology, the term “environmental error” is widely used [18], meaning incorrect data application by transferring them into individual objects, or fitting them into certain norms. Environmental errors are the result of a logical error in statistic data interpretation when conclusions on individual nature are deduced from conclusions intended for the entire group to which these individuals belong to.

On the other hand, the micro approach makes it possible to single out the degree of local instability, invisible at macro level[20]. This approach makes it possible to improve the existing concepts of social relations sustainability by elucidating social innovations at local level [19].

Within the framework of the hypothesis, both civilized, moral, and value systems should not only exhibit the core’s fundamental characteristics but also form sociocultural space invariants. At the same time, there is a variable part that arose as a result of other value systems inversion. Therefore, a micro approach is applied in order to highlight local instability degree.

Distribution of evaluated indicators across the region’s territory is not universal - it is a so called sociocultural landscape. Objects’ distribution analysis derives from the question answers - “Which value, in your opinion, national (or religious) identity does have in social life while shaping public mood?” and “What does national (religious) identity mean to you?”. Kostomuksha city district and Kalevala municipal district have broken the identity distribution seriously.

The results could be interpreted as follows: national (and religious) identity is being seriously actualized (acquires significance) in social life of a local community (opposed to the region as a whole). The last migration wave, apparently, formed not only a newly formed community (the city of Kostomuksha), but a Catholic and Muslim inversion in a social landscape.

The following inverse groups are distinguished in the landscape (Fig. 4):

- a group with a fairly high percentage of people who attributed themselves to Catholic Christianity was made up by respondents from Kostomuksha city district (9.8% of all believers) and neighboring Kalevala municipal region (9.7%).
- a group with a fairly high percentage of people who classified themselves as Islam was made up by representatives of Kostomuksha (7.6%) and Petrozavodsk (4.7%) urban districts.

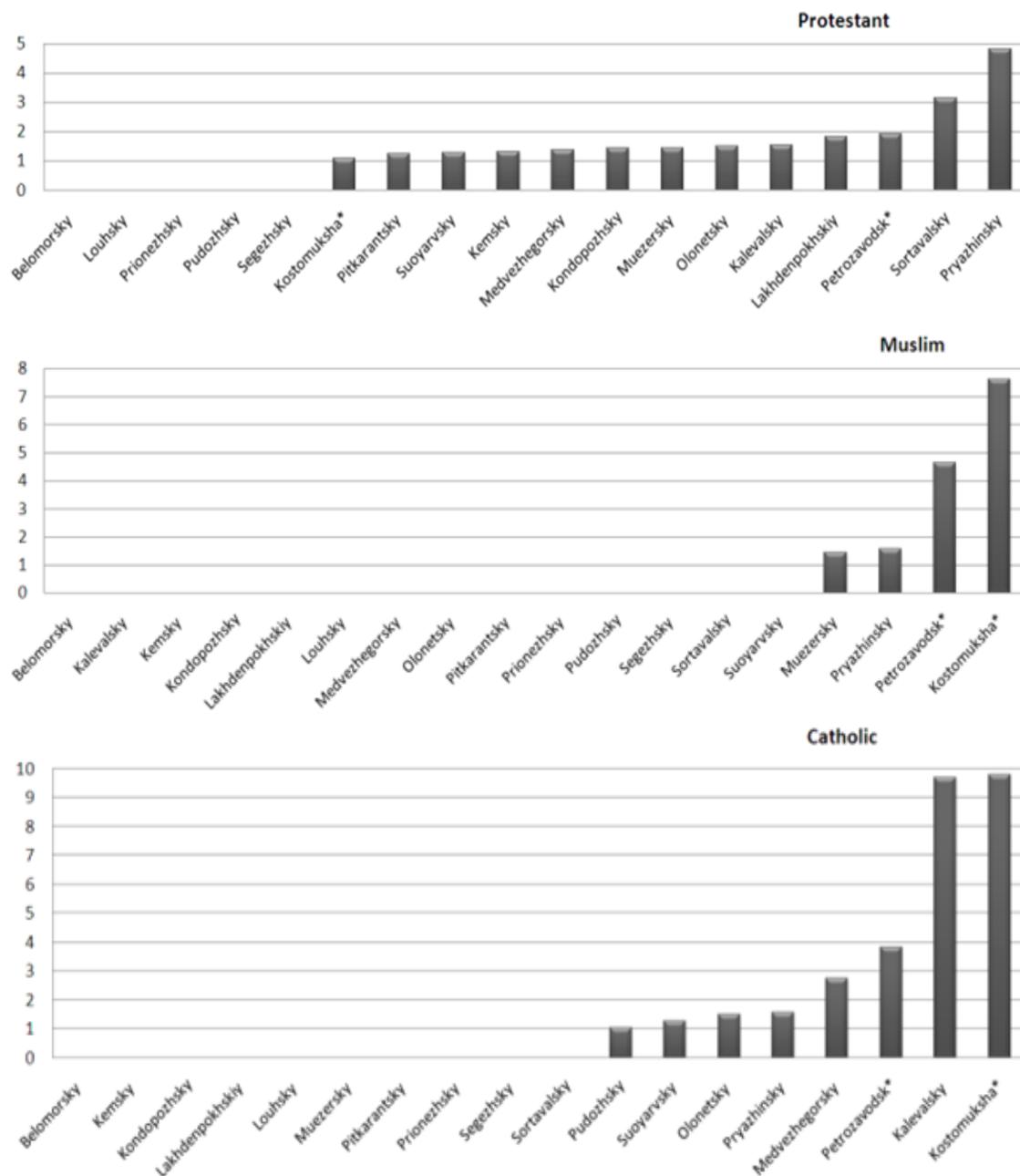


Figure 2. Respondents' answers to the question «Which religious beliefs you consider belonging to?» (developed by the authors)

What is the reason for such an inversion? The evolutionary rhythms of social relations structure could be traced by the example of Kostomuksha city. More than 30 years are insufficient for the city community to converge with the region in its all aspects.

Since the local community has been formed recently, it can and shall have differences. For example, an identification in relation to religion has a difference. Local community has not "entered" the regional core completely. Kostomuksha city is the only municipality where respondents considered "religious affiliation" as an identifying attribute that brings people of the same nationality closer to the "national language" and "traditions". At the same time 92% of Kostomuksha respondents identified

themselves as “believers” (with an average regional level in Karelia of 75%). Moreover, 72% consider themselves to be “Orthodox Christians”, 9% attribute themselves to Catholic Christianity, 1% to Protestant Christianity, 7% to Islam.

Both ethnic and ideological identity, of course, include a much larger (than considered in this study) set of signs reflecting both self-identification methods and other ethnocultural groups perceptions. At the same time we believe that the hypothesis of invariants presence was confirmed. Thus, empirically identifying signs were revealed both as social space invariants and features.

6. Conclusion

Our empirical study carried out in the framework of a hypothesis of invariants was studied in the temporal and spatial dimensions. Thanks to sociological studies relations spatial distribution of some ethnocultural groups and religions was revealed. It turned out that social geosystems structure has not only a solid fundamental (invariant) part, but also a variable part that evolves under the influence of geoeconomic and geopolitical factors. Sociocultural space invariants (empirically evaluated identifications that remain relatively unchanged in temporal and spatial dimensions) and inversions are revealed. Kostomuksha city district and its neighboring Kalevala municipal district acted as localities violating sociocultural harmony.

In this study, we relied on a hypotheses of invariants; for this reason, the findings were preliminary. To understand the true nature of localities, a more accurate diagnosis of not only invariant, but of special subethnos parts is necessary. Therefore, it is important to understand emerging trends, social order both causes and consequences, to determine invariants and characteristics of regional social space in terms of geopolitical instability and migration challenge. Despite the found differences, based on a proposed logic, the city of Kostomuksha and Kalevala municipal region, as we expect, shall gradually move closer to the core.

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