Social factors of territorial self-development in the Russian Arctic: results of sociological research in the Murmansk region in 2008-2017

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Abstract. The article presents the results of a sociological study of factors of territorial self-development in the Murmansk region of the Russian Arctic. The dynamics of the sociological estimates of specific social factors for the period of 2008-2017 was analysed based on surveys conducted by the authors. The study revealed that in the group of factors of personal well-being, the main trend was deterioration, as perceived by respondents. This manifested in a decreased proportion of respondents who consider themselves middle-income and an increased proportion of those who consider themselves poor. The positive trends included a slightly increased level of satisfaction with life in general and a slender tendency towards growth in confidence of respondents in their future. In the group of factors of social well-being, contradictory trends were observed. Throughout the decade the socio-economic problems persisted, the most acute of which, as respondents reported, had been rising prices and low living standard. Estimates of approval of the activities of local and regional authorities were declining, and the level of social patience was decreasing. Nevertheless, the estimates of place attachment have been persistently high, and this can be regarded as a strong factor potentially contributing to the self-development of the region.

1. Introduction

A key idea of the “Fundamentals of the state policy of the regional development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025” is a sustainable development of territorial socio-economic systems. The corresponding policy is implemented through securing the constitutional rights of citizens, improving the economic situation and the quality of life of the population, as well as addressing other tasks of economic, social and environmental development at the local and regional levels [1].

An important role in ensuring sustainable development of municipalities and regions is attributed to territorial self-development, or “bottom-up” development, occurring mainly at the expense of internal resources. This process includes increasing attention to the social factors of self-development – social phenomena and processes that take place in a community and affect local and regional development. The growing attention to social factors influencing territorial self-development is associated with a growing awareness that people are the most valuable asset, the purpose and the engine of development that creates and implements new ideas and initiatives [2].
The purpose of this article is to present the results of a study of the dynamics of sociological estimates of social factors of self-development of the territorial communities in the Russian Arctic in the period of 2008-2017. The work is based on a case study of the Murmansk region. The region entirely belongs to the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and is one of the most populated Arctic regions of the Russian Federation (in 2017, the population of the region amounted to 757.6 thousand people [3] which is more than 30% of the population of the Russian Arctic).

2. Territorial self-development and factors stimulating it

“Development” became a global project in the late 1940s, and for about four decades the main approach to achieving it was based on the assumption that the economic development of countries, regions, and municipalities is its goal, industrialization is its instrument, and the state is its main implementing force [4]. Since the beginning of the 1990s, with the diminishing role of the state in the course of neoliberal reforms engulfing many countries, the theories of regional development have shifted their emphasis from exogenous (external) factors to endogenous (internal) factors (sources) of development.

A new approach appeared in response to the shortcomings of the classical theories of regional development, such as the concept of the economic base, the theory of the main product, the concept of growth poles and others. These theories, created in the frame of the exogenous approach, attributed the main role in the development of territories to the accumulation of physical and human capital, technological factors [5] and investments from external businesses. The exogenous approach implied that the basis for the development of the territory is the arrival of large companies that have modern technologies and receive tax benefits, cheap loans and access to land from the state to develop infrastructure [6]. As time has shown, this approach was not able to ensure the sustainable development of territories, since many communities do not possess the resources to attract companies or are too remote from external employers, and the arrival of external companies often does not bring benefits to local communities.

The new approach, called “endogenous development”, began to consider development not as a functional, but as a territorial process, methodologically based on case studies, rather than sectoral analysis. Proponents of this approach began to establish that development policies are more effective when they are implemented by local actors, rather than central administrations [7]. Since the early 1990s new concepts of endogenous territorial development started to be developed: the concept of regional and local self-development, self-reliant development, self-help, community viability, bottom-up development, community capacity building, community resilience, and others [2].

These concepts have a common basis – a territorial approach to development. The endogenous approach is based on the hypothesis that a territory can be considered as a network of interests of a territorial community and, therefore, can be perceived as an actor of local development [7]. One of the key points of this approach is that the economy should cease to be overly dependent on external decisions and become a result of the choice of local entrepreneurs and cooperation between local stakeholders.

Most generally the concept of territorial self-development is associated with the local efforts to develop the community. In the 1990s, self-development was defined as the implementation of local projects or the establishment of businesses that increase income or the number of jobs in communities [7], [8]. Since the 2000s self-development increasingly began to be understood as “bottom-up” activities that aim to develop local industries and local communities and use local and external (neo-endogenous approach) resources to promote economic activity within communities [6], [9]. The inclusion in the concept of self-development of activities aiming to develop local community – a collective social system, a community of people united by the territory of residence and shared basic interests, – emphasized that the concept of territorial self-development accentuates local social resources [9].

Endogenous factors of territorial development arise from the resources and knowledge base of the region or municipality itself. They include local entrepreneurship and innovations, the introduction of
new technologies, leadership, institutional potential and the possibilities of institutional development, etc. Today, increasing attention is paid to the social factors of territorial self-development, and these factors include the socio-demographic composition of the population and the demographic trends, social development, education, the growth of human and social capital, the level of development of social infrastructure, the level of personal welfare, the degree of personal and social well-being, the level of social tension and social patience, residents' perceptions of state and municipal policies, the ability to self-organize, attitude toward the territory of residence (attachment to a place), increased role of local communities and their activities for territorial development, and others [5], [10].

3. Research methods
The main method of the research was the method of sociological survey. Questionnaire-based surveys of the monitoring type were conducted in 2008-2017 in the municipalities of the Murmansk region. The sample size in different years for each survey depended on the number of inhabitants in the region and, as a rule, amounted to about 700-1100 people in a year. The composition of the respondents corresponded to the age and sex structure of the population of the region, as well as the ratio between urban and rural population.

The surveys were conducted apartment by apartment, in step-by-step intervals. The information was processed using the SPSS program, which allowed us to tabulate the data with respect to pairings necessary for the study. Methods of graphic modeling, cause-and-effect, logical-structural and comparative analyses were used for data processing and interpretation. Methodological and methodical approaches of such areas of scientific knowledge as regional economics, sociology, social philosophy, statistics were used to facilitate a well-reasoned explanation of social phenomena that influence the processes of territorial self-development in the Murmansk region and in the Russian Arctic.

4. Results
In this study, we distinguished 2 groups of the social factors influencing the processes of territorial self-development in the regions of the Russian Arctic. The first group, the “factors of personal well-being”, included assessments by the residents of the level of their material welfare, self-identification by income level (through aspects of poverty or wealth and personal purchasing power), and level of satisfaction with life in general.

To the second group, the “factors of social well-being”, we attributed residents’ perceptions of the presence and rating of the most acute socio-economic and environmental problems of the territory, the residents’ perceptions of state and municipal policies and effectiveness of state and municipal policies in organizing the life of local and regional societies, the information transparency of authorities and the effectiveness of feedback channels as the basis for the interaction between authorities and society, assessments of the social mood (including estimates of the levels of social patience and protest), as well as attitude toward the territory of residence (place attachment).

4.1. The factors of personal well-being
In the group of those factors of self-development of territorial communities that relate to personal well-being, a sociological assessment of the “level of material well-being” factor revealed that, according to the respondents in the Murmansk region, the ratio of their average per capita income and the cost of living in the period 2008-20017 was declining. According to statistics [11], this ratio in the region over the past decade has been lower than the country average and the indicators in the North-West Federal District [12]. Both sociological and statistical estimates indicate a more vulnerable position of the population in the Murmansk region, where the incomes of the residents are formed mainly, as in other regions of the Russian Arctic, by salaries and almost do not include other types of income, for example, the income from household plots.

The study of such a factor of territorial self-development as self-identification by income level allows to reveal the problem of social inequality, which in the Murmansk region, as well as throughout
the country, is becoming increasingly relevant. Our research shows that during the periods of tougher state policy with regard to the regions of the North and the Arctic of the Russian Federation the perception of residents of these regions about their material well-being can differ significantly from the statistics of the state authorities [13]. The results of our surveys suggest that, starting from the crisis of 2008 and until 2014, in the Murmansk region there was observed a decrease in the proportion of those who consider themselves to be middle-income and rich, with an insignificant decrease in the number of those who consider themselves to be poor. Since 2014, there has been a trend in the opposite direction, and by 2017 the proportion of respondents who consider themselves to be people with a middle income has increased to 52.3%. However, this happened because in 2014-2017 the level of desired income indicated by the survey respondents was decreasing. At the same time, the share of those who consider themselves rich fell to 0.3%. The perceptions of the respondents regarding their level of wealth and welfare had been changing significantly over time. For example, in 2017 there was observed a sharper differentiation in self-identification on the scale from rich to poor and the associated growth of anxiety and mood of uncertainty.

Sociological assessment in the period of 2008-2017 showed a trend of decline in people’s perception of the level of their material well-being. This was manifested in a reduced percentage of respondents who consider themselves to be people with middle income and an increased percentage of those who consider themselves to be poor. This is also supported by the residents’ rating of the most acute problems, in which rising prices and low living standards occupied the leading positions every year.

Differentiation of income has a direct impact on the purchasing power of the population. According to nationwide polls in 2017, 10% of Russians do not have enough money for food, and 29% of the population have barely enough money for food and clothing [14]. According to a survey of residents of the Murmansk region in 2017, the share of respondents who do not have enough money to buy clothes and even food reached 55.1%, while in the Russian Federation the same indicator was about 39% [14]. Such estimates are particularly alarming if one considers the threat of crises such as the current pandemic of the coronavirus infection COVID-19, which could deepen social and economic inequalities, which in turn, could make the virus more deadly since lower-income people are more likely to contract the disease.

Low level of income negatively affects the quality of life of the population, and improving the quality of life is one of the key factors for self-development of the territory, since this process not only affects the growth of well-being of the population but also contributes to a more intensive development of small business and self-employment.

Another important social factor in the self-development of the territory in the field of personal well-being is the level of satisfaction with life in general. The results of our study indicate an increased polarization of respondents’ opinions in 2008-2017 in the Murmansk region: the number of people satisfied with life increased (51.4% in 2017 compared to 43.3% in 2008), but the share of those who found it difficult to answer the question also increased. There is also a tendency towards a growth in confidence of respondents in their future (51.9% in 2017 compared to 42.5% in 2008).

4.2. The factors of social well-being

In the second group of factors of territorial self-development, “the factors of social well-being”, the analysis of residents’ perceptions regarding the presence and rating of the most acute socio-economic problems of the territory showed that in 2008-2017 the most pressing problems for residents of the Murmansk region were the following: rise in prices, low living standards, social insecurity, low housing affordability, and insufficient quality of housing and communal services and healthcare. It was revealed that in material terms life and work in the North and in the Arctic ultimately lost their former advantages over other regions of the Russian Federation.

The study of such a factor as the residents’ perception of the state and municipal policies as well as their effectiveness in organizing the life of local and territorial societies showed that in the
investigated period in the region there was observed a downward trend in approval ratings of the activities of regional and local authorities.

Assessments of the factor of information transparency of authorities and the effectiveness of feedback channels as the basis for interaction between government and society showed that throughout the study period, people felt excluded from participating in finding solutions to existing problems, and in the mind of a majority of respondents the authorities were to a large extent closed to influence and control from the society. The main hopes for improving the situation in the region were associated with the actions of the federal authorities.

Another factor in the second group of factors that affect territorial self-development is the social mood that is one of the integral indicators of people's perception of socio-economic, socio-political and other processes taking place in society. Social mood as a factor influencing territorial self-development includes such aspects as the situation in the region and the municipality, personal and consumer moods, and expectations. The assessment of the social mood is the basis of prognostic opportunities for evaluating social factors that influence the processes of territorial self-development. The studies of social mood include assessment of such aspects as the levels of social patience and protest. The deterioration of the socio-economic situation directly reflects on the level of social patience.

The study showed that in 2008-2017 the level of social patience in the Murmansk region was declining. In 2017, the share of those respondents who answered “everything is not so bad” amounted to 28%, and this group mainly included middle-aged men and people with middle income. The 36.6% of the respondents answered that “life became harder” (this group consisted mainly of low-income people and older men). The share of those who find it difficult to assess their attitude to the current life situation has also increased.

A study of the level of social patience showed that for a long time (in 2009–2016), the answers of respondents were dominated by the assertion that “life is hard, but tolerable” – this was the opinion of more than a third of the respondents. In 2017, the share of those who responded similarly decreased by 10%, which suggests an increase in wariness in relation to the processes taking place in society, which is also indicated by the increased percentage of people who found it difficult to answer (20.5%). The second position was occupied by the option “everything is not so bad, and you can live” [12]. A negative trend was observed from the scores given to the option “it has become impossible to tolerate our plight” – the proportion of respondents who answered in this way increased from 15.3% in 2009 to 20.5% in 2017.

Social protest is a specific form of action of social actors and one of the important indicators of social mood. It is formed under the influence of unresolved or aggravated social problems and it determines the willingness of people to protect their interests or the interests of the local community in one way or another [15]. Among the most significant reasons which can potentially trigger mass protests, residents of the Murmansk region regularly indicate rising prices and low living standard. This is expected, taking into account the above results of the analysis of the material well-being of the population of the region. The mood of protest can also be regarded as an indicator of the level of social development, as an indicator of the government performance and as an indicator of a public request for improving social policy. For example, in 2017 16.2% of the respondents were ready to participate in rallies and demonstrations to protect their interests.

Studies of the factor of attitude to the territory of one's residence (place attachment) showed that changes in the attitude of the population of the Murmansk region to their place of residence over the analyzed period can be defined as insignificant. Among those respondents who were completely (17.5%) or overall (35.2%) satisfied with their place of residence in 2017, the majority had middle level of income. Those who “got simply used to living in the North and had no intention to move” comprised 10.3% of the respondents, among them were middle-aged people and middle-income men. Almost a quarter of the respondents expressed a desire to leave the Murmansk region and settle in another region of Russia, but many of them did not have enough money to relocate. Thus, about 70%
of the respondents, on the basis of various considerations, associated their future fate with the Murmansk region.

5. Conclusions
The conducted study made it possible to draw the following conclusions about the trends in the dynamics of sociological estimates of social factors facilitating or hindering territorial self-development in the Murmansk region.

In the first group of factors, the “factors of personal well-being”, the main trends in the period of 2008-2017 were associated with deterioration of personal well-being as perceived by respondents. This was manifested in a decrease throughout the entire period of the ratio between the per capita income and the cost of living as seen by respondents, a decrease in the proportion of respondents who consider themselves to be people with middle-income, and an increase in the proportion of those who think they are poor. Such trends are especially worrying in times of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic that can exacerbate socio-economic inequalities, which in turn, could make the virus more devastating as those with lower income are more likely to contract it. The positive trends included a slightly increased level of satisfaction with life in general and a slender tendency towards growth in confidence of respondents in their future.

In the second group of factors, the “factors of social well-being”, investigated period showed contradictory trends. Every year the socio-economic problems persisted, the most acute of which, according to the respondents, had been rising prices, low standard of living, social insecurity, and low quality of housing and communal services and healthcare. Estimates of approval of the activities of regional and local authorities were declining, and in the mind of the majority of respondents, the authorities even at the local level remained largely closed to influence and control from the society. The level of social patience tended to decrease.

The study showed that despite the mentioned problems the population of the Murmansk region continues to have a positive attitude to the territory of their residence and estimates of attachment to the place are persistently high. This can be regarded as a positive signal and a strong factor potentially contributing to the self-development of the territorial communities of the region, which should receive special attention when implementing regional and local socio-economic policies aimed at achieving sustainable development in the Murmansk region and in the Russian Arctic as a whole.

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