

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Urban and rural students in the Urals: socio-residential assimilation issues



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Abstract. The article discusses current problems of the rural youth migration to the cities in the context of socio-residential assimilation, suggesting a convergence of lifestyles of different large and small social groups living in different types of settlements. The author analyzes the significance of social environments for the formation of political culture of young villagers and the development of their values in the sphere of self-identification.

The article suggests that successful strategic socio-economic development (prosperity) of large cities, especially megacities, should be closely connected with their responsibility for the adequate development of small towns and rural settlements in order to reproduce and save labor potential of agricultural production in the region and ensure decent life for all actors in this production.

The authors' reflections and conclusions are based on the results of comparative sociological surveys of the urban and rural youth, carried out in various cities and rural settlements of some RF subjects within the Ural Federal District in 2008–2014.

Key words: city, village, family, youth, socialization, labor, education, socio-residential assimilation, values, lifestyle.

Historically *socio-residential assimilation* has been one of the mechanisms of society's progressive development, suggesting *convergence of lifestyles of different large and small*

social groups living in different types of settlements. In the broad sense assimilation (from lat. *assimilatio* – adaptation, amalgamation, adoption) is a process when two or more

groups, previously different in the internal organization, value orientations and culture, create a new community, where their group identity is changed and the sense of identity and specificity is lost.

The concept “*village-city*” reflects socio-residential differences existing in Russia most vividly. Basic assimilation changes of the population are determined primarily by the processes concerning the youth part of the society and manifested in the transformed lifestyle of “fathers and children” generations. This transformation can be fixed in the changed structure and character of forming (formed) needs and value orientations of young people as they get older. They are reflected in their life plans, choice of basic means of their achievement and forms of everyday behavior and actions. What features does the process of socio-residential assimilation of young people have in the Urals?

The article uses data of integrated regional studies on livelihoods of the rural and urban families in the Urals, their role in preparing children for adult life. Specifically sociological studies were conducted by the author in 2008–2014 at the Institute of Economics, the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences on the basis of a number of towns and rural settlements in the Urals, in particular:

1. *In 2008* in 7 cities and 14 rural settlements of the Perm Oblast, the Sverdlovsk Oblast and the Chelyabinsk Oblast the following respondents were surveyed by the author’s questionnaire:

a) middle and high school students in urban schools – 900 persons;

b) middle and high school students in rural schools – 540 persons;

c) parents surveyed students in urban schools – 770 persons – “**Ural-1**”.

2. *In 2009* the survey of 680 students of technical and humanitarian faculties of USTU-UPI about the involvement in religion – “**Ural-2**”.

3. *In February–March 2013* there was a survey of 510 middle and high school students in 15 secondary schools in Kirovsky District of the city of Yekaterinburg and 300 students in 9 schools in the closed administrative-territorial formation of Lesnoy of the Sverdlovsk Oblast connected with the analysis of socialization processes and young citizens training for adult life (boys – 46%, girls – 54%) – “**Ural-3**”.

The overall research goal of the social projects implementation was to identify the factors and circumstances that accompany the undesirable trend of narrowed reproduction of the capable rural population in the region at the expense of young villagers who are eager to learn, live and work in cities. The study object was high school students from rural and urban schools, university students, that is young people on the verge of choice of occupation, place of residence, place of realization of their social, in particular labor, potencies. Another important factor should be emphasized. The research is carried out in a particular Russian region—the Urals, which has, along with the national traits and characteristics, its own, often unique, natural-climatic, historical-settlement, socio-economic and ethnic characteristics. The latter exert their influence on the process of

human reproduction, in general, and on the socialization of young generations, in particular.

There is a significant limitation. Due to the restrictions presupposed by the article size, our empirical framework is mainly based on the results of public opinion polls. Let us remember that the key attributes of the new governance model include the principle, according to which “public opinion, citizens’ opinion should be the main indicator to evaluate the performance of the government providing services to citizens and social institutions” [1].

First of all, let us note that the characteristics of a rural lifestyle (as opposed to urban) are associated with the specifics of labor and life of the inhabitants: subordination of their activity to rhythms and cycles of the year; more difficult working conditions than in the city; low capacity for villagers’ labor mobility; great integration of work and life, cogency and labor-intensiveness of work at farm household. So, the work on private land, in the garden takes villagers literally a half of their lives – about 180 days a year on average; a number of lessons in free time is relatively limited.

The rural environment of children’s socialization has its own traditional features. It should be taken into account that the lifestyle of rural settlements has preserved the elements of traditional neighborhood. There is quite a stable composition of the population, weak socio-professional and cultural differentiation and close family and neighborhood relations. To what extent does the continuing traditional rural lifestyle determine features of the natural

reproduction process and formation of material and spiritual needs, values and life plans of young villagers?

Our young respondents in the Ural cities and villages (“Ural-1”), as well as in the big city – Yekaterinburg (“Ural-3”) were asked a question: “*Below there are some values, which an adult can seek after. Choose five most important values to you*”. We got the following answers (tab. 1).

First of all, it cannot but surprise that the responses of young city dwellers and villagers are practically identical in the 2008 survey. The difference in various positions is within the statistical error. Such similarity in value orientations is mainly related to the impact of the single information-ideological field created by the Internet, television, radio and other media on young people. The five-year lag between surveys (“Ural-1” and “Ural-2”) has not practically changed the structure of value orientations of young citizens in the sphere of material wealth, but a bit raised their claims and expectations in the sphere of spiritual life (*friends, leisure, good to people, good name*) [2].

The family was, is and will remain a key social institution of the population reproduction, ensuring nation-building. The family was, is and will remain the most important component in the construction of identity and way of life of each particular person and each particular social group. It is the institute of the parent family with its unique influence on the formation of a child’s personality that serves as the main tool of assimilation processes among the youth. The health and attitude of urban and rural adolescents to the conditions

Table 1. Most preferred life values, which, according to the young city dwellers and villagers, young people can seek after (% of the total number of respondents for each group; in 2008 – a survey of 900 urban and 570 rural adolescents: in 2013 – a survey of 510 adolescents in Yekaterinburg and 300 in CATF “Lesnoy”)

Values to be pursued	Groups of pupils			
	“Ural-1”		“Ural-3”	
	City	Village	Ekaterinburg	Lesnoy
Good family and children	87	88	No data	No data
Good parents	No data	No data	57	62
Good health	68	70	72	78
Good friends, true friends	66	54	81	77
Favorite job and successful business career	68	67	No data	No data
Opportunity to study favorite education profession in the university	No data	No data	68	69
Opportunity to earn money for your own needs	No data	No data	61	51
Material well-being, economic independence, self-dependence	58	46	52	47
Good housing conditions	42	46	40	49
Consciousness that you do good to people	23	25	31	30
Informative, interesting leisure	27	20	47	44
Honesty, conscientiousness, good name	23	23	30	33
Sense of security from violence, theft	No data	No data	29	29
Faith in God	No data	No data	21	13
No data – this option was not included in the questionnaire of the respective survey.				

of its existence in the parent family can be assessed, to some extent, by the results of the survey “Ural-1”. Below we present the questions and answers of our young respondents (% of the total number of respondents; in the numerator – in the city – 900 people; in the denominator – in the village – 540 people).

1. Which category do you, your family, parents belong to in terms of living standard and prosperity now?

Live in full prosperity for now	45/52
Have an average income	52/45
Live on the edge of poverty	2/2
Live on the breadline	1/1
It is difficult to answer	0.6/0.7

2. Please, rate how you eat in the parent family:

My meals in the family can be assessed as:	Excellent	58/64
	Good	32/30
	Satisfactory	4/2
	Unsatisfactory	1/1
They can be different: stuff today and starve tomorrow		2/1
Difficult to answer		3/2

3. Rate, how friendly your family is:

Very friendly	57/60
More or less friendly	36/33
Not very friendly	5/5
Not friendly, everyone on their own	2/1
It is difficult to answer	0.3/1

It is not difficult to notice almost identical socio-economic well-being of urban and rural adolescents in parent families. Socio-economic illnesses experienced by the society as a whole can not but affect the livelihood of families that make up this society. The society is “ill” – most families are “ill”. The institute of Russian families both in the city and in the village is “ill”. Here are some manifestations of this disease.

“Education, if it wishes happiness to a person,” K.D. Ushinsky wrote, “should educate him/her not for happiness, but prepare for work life... Education should develop a habit and love of work; it should give a person the opportunity to find work in his/her life... Education should not only develop human brain and give him a known volume of information, but it should spark a serious thirst for labor, without which his/her life can be neither decent nor happy” [4, p. 155].

We will try to answer the question, to what extent today’s parent families “*spark thirst for serious work in children*”. Adulthood is not only age period, but also participation

in work and fulfilment of family obligations. However, the period of adolescence can be a time of lost opportunities and increased (from a medical point of view) risk if there is no adequate preparation for adult life, including family, or if the youth’s behavior models can not be adapted to changing social conditions. We got the following responses (% of the total number of surveyed boys and girls in the village; *tab. 2*) on the question “Do you know how to do (more or less satisfactorily) the following activities?”

Is it good or bad, that in Russia (in our case in the **Urals**) 47% of modern 16–17-year-old rural girls (note: who will be wives and mothers in the near future) know how to cook beet-root soups, soups, 40% – bake cakes, 17% – make jam and pickles? Yes, it is most likely good for the families of their parents and their own future families. But let us look at these numbers from the other side. According to the self-assessments of girls-villagers, by the 10–11th grade 53% of the total number of respondents had not learned to cook soup, 60% – bake cakes and 83% – make jam and pickles. Let us note

Table 2. Skills of rural adolescents
(% of the total number of respondents for each family group)

Types of work activities	Boys (village)	Types of work activities	Girls (village)
Cut, chop wood	45	Cook beet-root soups, soups	47
Cut grass	33	Bake cakes	40
Drive a car	33	Embroider	39
Ride a motorcycle	29	Knit mittens, socks	17
Mow up hay, straw	14	Make pickles, jams	17
Drive a tractor	13	Sew dresses, clothing	13
Work as carpenter	11	Milk a cow	13
Tackle up	7	Bake bread	9

that the girls were not city dwellers, “close” to public catering, but villagers, “close to the earth” and natural economy.

It would be wrong to assess the children’s sense of belonging to domestic work only in terms of their utilitarian readiness for self-service in the sphere of consumer activity of the family group. Skills in one or another form of domestic labor, permanent attachment to it is an evidence of general labor socialization of the child (young person), development of not only labor qualities like diligence, dedication, endurance, agility, but also such personal qualities as an ability to combine personal, group and public interests, formation of a respectful attitude to material wealth, work, sense of responsibility for behavior, development of a sense of kindness, empathy and compassion, etc.

According to the survey “Ural-3”, urban adolescents do not work much at home. As for the question “*What kind of work do you do regularly at home and in the garden (more or less constantly)?*”, the answers of the pupils living in two towns in the Urals were distributed as follows (% of the total number of respondents for each city; in the numerator – answers of the respondents from Ekaterinburg – 510 people, in the denominator – CATF “Lesnoy”– 300 people):

a) work at home:

Dust with a vacuum cleaner	67/64
Wash up the dishes	65/66
Regularly go to the grocery store	49/51
Do wet cleaning, wash the floors	46/ 46
Cook food (soup, main dish)	32/32
Iron linen	27/28

b) work in the garden:

Water vegetables, flowers, berries	51/39
Collect “time-consuming” berries (sea-buckthorn, currants, etc.)	37/33
Weed seed beds	33/26
Dig the earth, seed beds	27/23
Heat the stoves (in the house, bath-house)	21/17
Responsible for cooking	13/13

c) work either at home or in the garden:

Look after domestic animals (dogs, cats, etc.)	59/55
Help to repairs the house, garden	35/36
Look after younger brothers and sisters	32/33
Look after older relatives (a grandmother)	22/19
Plant (look after) seedlings, flowers	17/15
Look after a car, motorcycle	12/10

“Intellectualism” of a modern teenager and large amount of acquired knowledge are often achieved due to a lack of household duties in the family and in the process of school education. Meanwhile, the problem of labor education is intrinsically linked to the formation of teenager’s social maturity, which does not always coincide with the acceleration of its physical development and saturation of information [5].

“Rural syndrome” has its antipode – “city syndrome” with the traits that are less perceptible for humans, but socially even more negative. We are talking about the temptations of idleness provoked by real opportunities to live in the city (a large one) for months and years (even a lifetime) without doing any work. This involves direct moral decay of if not parents, then surely of their children. The possibility of domestic consumption “contributes” to the citizens’ estrangement from labor activity; it leads to the full orientation on the service sector in all little things of life.

Thus, there appears an infantile generation who is not capable for basic self-service and has corresponding shifts in the psyche [6].

Such a fact draws our attention. The survey “Ural-3” included an additional position “*faith in God*”. Of 510 young people from Ekaterinburg 105 respondents (21%) chose this value, along with the others; 13% of the respondents from CATF “Lesnoy” did the same (see tab. 1). Not giving the detailed analysis of this phenomenon, we note that nowadays religiosity (for example, the fact of considering themselves as believers in the youth environment) often has a situational character, it does not reveal worldview, but mindset, “elements of youth subcultures”, characterized by considerable mobility. Often people consider themselves as Orthodox believers or Muslim, perceiving these religions as an essential element of cultural traditions.

The rural youth’s adoption of a “basis” of the urban peers’ deviant subculture is one of the most important components of the socio-residential assimilation process [7]. In particular, it is important to identify young people’s moral and ethical values in the sphere of asocial manifestations and how they are reflected in the social development process. According to the study “Ural-2”, the relative difference in value orientations and moral evaluations of most asocial manifestations in various socio-demographic groups is insignificant. So, 57% of all surveyed pupils did not consider “drunkenness” as a sin, 50% of them identified themselves as “Orthodox believers”.

There is an interesting distribution of answers to the same question by two groups of students – men and women. “*Abortion*” is considered as a sin by 66% of men and 78% of women; “*homosexuality*” – by 64/41%, respectively; “*prostitution*” – 59/69%; “*infidelity*” (to husband/wife) – 57/65%; “*drunkenness*” – 37/48%, etc. [8].

There is another important thesis for our analysis. The sphere of professional education, represented mainly by universities in large cities, is the socio-cultural “forge”, through a moral “crucible” and “anvil” of which the vast majority of future specialists of the village come. With the certificate of degree they bring culture from city to village, along with the antipodes and flaws of urban civilization. It is sad, but true.

Socio-residential assimilation of the rural youth in the cities is closely connected not only with the solution of socio-cultural tasks of strategic development of the Russian society. Any turning point in their solution directly affects the state of economy, welfare of the population and food security. In the near future the Russian society will have to answer the questions: who and how will cultivate the Russian land-feeder; who will grow cattle and poultry for future kebabs and burgers; how can it arouse interest (note: “not force”) in rural boys and girls to ignore alluring lights of the city and live and work on the homeland of their fathers? and, finally, how can it stimulate the urban youth to reproduce attractive aspects of the rural lifestyle? These aspects should be attractive not due to ensured “hearty buffet”, but

due to preserved physical and moral health and maintained healthy lifestyle, in general. How serious is this problem in the Urals?

It is known that the city has always attracted the population of villages, farms and towns primarily due to: (a) an opportunity to get “prestigious” and “well-to-do” education; b) a wider choice of employment; c) a higher level of public services and amenities; d) a number of utilities and cultural services; d) unwillingness to do hard agricultural labor. All this has formed and reproduces the main direction of migration flows from rural settlements to urban, from small towns to large.

Let us try to answer the question: how identical are the interests of rural parent families and the state in the formation and realization of life plans of rural school pupils? Most parents want to “educate” and “settle” their children in the city, “far away from the village”. In turn, due to acute labor shortage in the agricultural production the state (if we ignore beautiful words) is interested to “settle” the villagers (both parents and their children) at their place of birth, following the proverb “Where you were born there you are useful”. Hence, there emerge and exist “objective” obstacles to the rural youth migration to the cities: limits with registration, difficulties with housing, “unaffordable” cost for training “urban professions”.

Let us summarize.

1. First of all, let us note that the emergence of fee paid higher education has significantly changed the combination of those factors that determine the entry of the rural (and not only rural) youth to the

universities. “Parents’ money” solves the problem of entering the university, paying for it, having means for life and leisure activities in the city. Getting a degree in “urban occupation” and the five-year urban lifestyle (taste of “beautiful life”) encourage them to settle in the city, closer to social benefits, which today are (and it is unknown when they will be) provided in their rural homeland. Villagers’ aspirations are based on almost identical (with the needs of urban peers) material and especially spiritual needs and interests, we have talked at the beginning of the article.

2. Today it is often argued that it is possible to solve the problem of labor resources in the Russian village by attracting labor migrants (in particular, from the CIS countries) and using surplus labor of the cities. Without dwelling on the analysis of unacceptability of (conviction of the author) the first option to solve the problem (and this is beyond the scope of this article), we will provide the reader with the available data regarding the second option. Let us raise a question: should the Ural villages wait for young personnel from the city? In our study “Ural-3” the pupils of two Ural cities were asked two questions concerning their future professional activity: the first is “What occupation would you like to get? (choose no more than five answer options) and the second is “What occupation do your parents advise you to choose?”. In the questionnaire of 40 occupations to choose there were three “truly rural” occupations: veterinarian, zootechnician and agronomist. The results are presented below (% of the total number of respondents

for each city; in the numerator – answers of the respondents from Yekaterinburg – 510 people; in the denominator – CATF “Lesnoy – 300 people):

Rural occupations	I have chosen on my own	Parents have advised
Veterinarian	6.2/6.7	3.6/4.6
Zootechnician	2.1/2.1	1.8/1.8
Agronomist	1.1/1.8	0.3 (1 person)/0.0

Obviously, such occupation as *agronomist* is “unpopular” among parents and their adolescent children in the Urals. Urban schoolchildren prefer traditionally rural occupation, such as a zootechnician, as in the city these specialists are required to treat domestic animals, primarily dogs and cats.

3. The Strategy for Innovative Development of the Village should address the following problems: why and how we should develop the economy of agricultural production, the rural way of life, in general, in order to implement the vision, mission and achieve the desired goals in the future. The innovation strategy provides a long-term prospect, a view “from the future to the present”. The strategy defines what to change and how to change. The questions being answered give us the opportunity to elaborate the mechanism of innovation development of the village as a system [9].

The essence of the innovation strategy of rural development is not only to foresee the changes of its commercial and industrial activities and develop solutions that ensure harmonious and sustainable development of this vital reproductive process. The strategy is to “provide” the desired transformation

of all spheres of social life in the rural society, its relationship with the city, the urban lifestyle. “The important goal”, the Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of December 12, 2013 states, “to increase the attractiveness of rural areas for life and work... the task to settle people in rural areas, create a modern and comfortable infrastructure in the rural areas is in the foreground” [10].

4. It is known that the doctrine of the noosphere developed and became widespread in the 20th century. It is a shell of the Earth, formed by the human mind on the basis of the biosphere (spheres of life). At the beginning of the 3d Millennium the researchers’ attention to studying global problems increased due to the necessity to find ways out of the global crisis. To save the world of those who are accurately described as our “younger brothers” by S. Esenin is a moral duty of the mankind, guilty of the destructive consequences of its impact on the natural environment. We are talking about the paternalism of Man over endangered species of fauna and flora.

We dare compare, by association, the relationship between major cities (especially megacities), on the one hand, and numerous small towns and rural-settlements, on the other hand, with the relationship between “older” and “younger brothers” in the development of urban culture in Russia. The results of these relations are not good. For the last decades the map of the country has lacked tens of thousands of villages and small towns. “The red book of settlements” should include thousands of previously

flourished and now stagnating cities, workers' settlements and large settlements. Let us note that the process of small settlements extinction is accompanied with the rapid growth and improvement of large and largest cities. They are, as a rule, administrative centers of the regions. There is a vivid example, such as the expanding and becoming more beautiful city of Ekaterinburg and most "thinning" cities and villages of the Sverdlovsk Oblast [11].

5. And the last one. Without going in detail about the problem (*it is the subject of another study*), we will present our proposal

for the elaboration and implementation of strategic plans for the development of successful cities. Increasing its beauty, fashionable character, strength and attractiveness, they ("older urban brothers") we should not forget about deep roots of such an "upsurge" of development. In other words, we are talking about the reconstruction of the special institute of "urban paternalism", which stipulates responsibility of big cities for "socio-economic health" and decent survival of surrounding residential areas. They say: "Don't cut the bow you are standing on"...

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